Writing against Death
the Autobiographies of Simone de Beauvoir



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262

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Cover illustration: Simone de Beauvoir at a book signing at the Librairie française, Rio de Janeiro 1960.
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Contents

(AUTO)BIOGRAPHY

List of Abbreviations

Page references to frequently quoted texts by Simone de Beauvoir appear in brackets in the text preceded by the abbreviations listed below. The editions used are those listed in the bibliography.

CA	*La Cérémonie des adieux*
DS	*Le Deuxième sexe*
FA	*La Force de l'âge*
FC	*La Force des choses*
MJFR	*Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*
MTD	*Une mort très douce*
TCF	*Tout compte fait*
LaV	*La Vieillesse*

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This book is dedicated to Chris Brickley, with love.

'Une figure, celle du Moi, cette "autre" qui est "moi", occupe, dans le texte, le lieu indécryptable du sujet de l'énonciation, une figure qui représente cet étrange dispositif autobiothanato-graphique où, au même moment, dans le même site, un peu avant, un peu après, "je" naît à "sa" mort, "je" meurt à "sa" vie'.[1]

Introduction

Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) is recognized as one of the leading intellectual figures of the 20th century whose influence stretches far beyond the confines of France. As writer, as philosopher, as intellectual, and as feminist activist, her ideas have touched both academic and non-academic spheres of activity. The ongoing fascination with her life and writings is testimony to the important contribution which she has made to feminist thought and to the questioning and reassessment of literary and philosophical canons. Study of these writings offers the opportunity to engage with philosophical, political, literary and feminist debates and to explore a number of key preoccupations of the intellectual in post-war France. These might range from explorations of existentialism and *littérature engagée* to studies of the relationship between literature, politics, philosophy and feminism. However, it is specifically Simone de Beauvoir's role as autobiographer, and the relationship of her autobiographical *œuvre* to autobiography studies which is the focus of this study. Close readings of *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, *La Force de l'âge*, *La Force des choses*, *Tout compte fait*, *Une mort très douce* and *La Cérémonie des adieux* explore the extent to which Beauvoir takes her own life as a case study.[2] Her energetic questioning and reassessment of her actions and the actions of others

[1] Louis Marin, *L'Écriture de soi: Ignace de Loyola, Montaigne, Stendhal, Roland Barthes* (Paris: PUF, 1999), p. 4.

[2] Page references to these texts appear in brackets in the text preceded by the following abbreviations: *MJFR*, *FA*, *FC*, *TCF*, *MD*, *CA*. The editions are those listed in the bibliography.

draws the reader towards her vision of a shared collective experience emerging from the particularities of her individual account. As she herself states in the third volume of her autobiography, *La Force des choses*:

> J'ai voulu que dans ce récit mon sang circule; j'ai voulu m'y jeter, vive encore, et m'y mettre en question avant que toutes les questions se soient éteintes (*FC*, I, p. 7).

It is precisely the interaction between the life lived and the texts purporting to depict it that arouses the reader's curiosity and prompts deeper probing of the relationship between life and text, a relationship which has been increasingly problematized in literary criticism. In fact, the autobiographies present a number of challenges to the reader already familiar with the author's life and work. They may seem at first glance to be relatively transparent and unproblematical accounts of a life lived, to be viewed in terms of a verifiable (and illuminating) documentary-style account which supplements the author's œuvre. They provide important accounts of the key social and historical events of the 20th century which shaped the writer's life; however, they also raise in the process key theoretical questions about the nature of autobiographical writing and the ways in which we write about living *and* dying, not forgetting the specific problems posed by the challenge of writing about the self.

In seeking to bring the writing of a life, and a life in writing (or indeed the writing of death, and death in writing) into productive, and sometimes contradictory, dialogues, the purpose of this study is to reconsider in its entirety Beauvoir's significant but often overlooked autobiographical *œuvre*, and to suggest ways of reading the texts which alert the reader to recent theorizing in autobiography studies. Firstly, the thematic links and structuring relationships between the autobiographical texts are examined in detail through the lens of *thanatos*. The inscription of existentialist and feminist narratives are traced, and their function assessed. Secondly, the pertinence of critiques of autobiographical theory and practice in relation to Beauvoir's life writing is considered, in particular the commentaries of French theorists including Marin and Derrida on the nature of 'autothanatographie' and literature's relationship to death more

generally.[3] The critic Deguy's analysis of the autobiographer's relationship to death emphasizes it as a necessary catalyst to the autobiographical enterprise: 'Malgré ses pièges, le récit autobiographique devient une nécessité vitale, quasi biologique, un acte de défi contre le lent travail de la mort nichée au cœur de chaque individu'.[4] This question is opened up in Beauvoir's œuvre through explorations of her associations of death with the Other, the feminine, the body, and the unknown. Questioning whether the author's preoccupation with death read through these narratives reveals their gendering provides a means to explore her complex self-expression as *woman* autobiographer. In parallel, my reading aims to rethink binary definitions of Beauvoir which oppose intellectual and feminist, public and private, masculine and feminine.

Simone de Beauvoir presents an ongoing questioning and exploration of her writing practice within the autobiographies whilst reminding us of the many ways in which writing intersects with, and is a necessary part of her daily experience. In the preface to *La Force des choses*, the third volume of her four-volume autobiography, the author identifies a number of problems facing any writer who chooses to write about his or her life, anticipating some of the objections which her readers might make. Can one ever tell all? ('[…] impossible de dire *tout* – des censeurs m'ont accusée d'indiscrétion, ce n'est pas moi qui ai commencé […]', *FC*, I, p. 9). To what extent will readers be involved in the recreation of key experiences that the author desires to share with them? ('Comme le précédent, ce livre demande au lecteur sa collaboration […]', *FC*, I, p. 10). How can 'truth' find a place in what is, after all, the textual world of autobiography? Can it ever really be an objective account? ('Je suis objective dans la mesure, bien entendu, où mon objectivité m'enveloppe', *FC*, I, p. 10). If the writer feels bound by the conventions of the genre to ground the text in verifiable experiences, then must aesthetic concerns come second?

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[3] See, for example, Marin, *La Voix excommuniée* (Paris: Galilée, 1981) and *L'Écriture de soi*, op. cit.; Blanchot, *La Part du feu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949) and *L'Espace littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955); Derrida, *Otobiographies: l'enseignement de Nietzsche et la politique du nom propre* (Paris: Galilée, 1984); Smith, *Derrida and Autobiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995) and Maclean, *The Name of the Mother: Writing Illegitimacy* (London: Routledge, 1994).

[4] In 'Simone de Beauvoir: la quête de l'enfance, le désir du récit, les intermittences du sens', *Revue des sciences humaines*, 222 (April-June 1991), 63-101 (p. 84).

(‘Non; pas une œuvre d’art, mais ma vie dans ses élans, ses détresses, ses soubresauts, ma vie qui essaie de se dire et non de servir de prétexte à des élégances’, *FC*, I, p. 8). Such questions are not new but they continue to challenge autobiographers and readers of autobiography. Indeed, it could be argued that Beauvoir anticipates in her autobiographical writings many of the doubts that are expressed in the latter half of the 20th century concerning the nature of the relationship between experience and its representation in autobiography, and identity and its configurations in autobiography.

From Augustine’s confession to God, to Descartes’ focus on the ‘cogito’, and Rousseau’s desire to reveal the ‘truth’ of the self, the art of writing the life continues to arouse interest in Western literature.[5] The ever-increasing number of publications which are classified as autobiography and which purport to represent a ‘self’ has elicited a wide range of critical responses in literary spheres as interest in autobiography as a genre has developed. In France, Lejeune’s definition of the genre by the ‘pacte autobiographique’ and his focus on Rousseau as a ‘founding father’ have been major factors in legitimating and valorizing the French autobiographical canon.[6] However, writers and critics have increasingly problematized the genre by questioning any assumed unity of the self in a culture that has believed in promoting the uniqueness of the individual. Women’s autobiography, developing as a distinct genre, has been part of this trend as notions of nurturing and interconnectedness have served as counterpoint to the model of the autonomous individual.[7] What is the reader to make of Beauvoir’s relationship to the genre? In both French and Anglo-American spheres the genre has been defined, disputed and even denied, to the extent that Sprinker argues that ‘concepts of subject, self, and author collapse into the act of producing a text’.[8] It

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[5] Saint Augustine’s *Confessions* (written c. 397), Descartes’ *Discours de la méthode* (written in 1637), and Rousseau’s *Confessions* (written between 1764-1770).

[6] See his principal works, *L’Autobiographie en France* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1971); *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Seuil, 1975); *Je est un autre* (Paris: Seuil, 1980); and *Moi aussi* (Paris: Seuil, 1986).

[7] See, for example, Friedman’s analysis of theories of nurturing in ‘Women’s Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice’, in *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women’s Autobiographical Writings*, ed. by S. Benstock (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), pp. 34-62.

[8] In ‘Fictions of the Self: The End of Autobiography’, in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. by J. Olney (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980), p. 342,

would seem that in the wealth of critiques on autobiography as genre, which range from unquestioning acceptance of the self as a unified entity to those focusing more on the self *as* text rather than on the self in the text, the writings of Simone de Beauvoir cannot be readily placed. With Doubrovsky's promotion of the term 'autofiction' in autobiography studies, writers and critics are all too aware of the uneasy, slippery relationship between truth and fiction, between the text and the world beyond the text which the genre occupies.[9] In this respect, it is worth pausing to consider some of the ways in which Simone de Beauvoir's autobiographies have been interpreted and classified within autobiography studies in order to provide a general critical context in which to situate this study.

Simone de Beauvoir within Autobiography Studies

In both French and non-French comparative studies of autobiography, Beauvoir's literary merits as autobiographer have tended to be downplayed, or indeed she has been ignored. This is perhaps surprising, since, as Keefe has observed, 'taken as a whole, the four volumes of Beauvoir's memoirs (well over three quarters of a million words) must form one of the longest autobiographies in any language by a woman'.[10] Beauvoir's position as autobiographer is paradoxical in various ways: she situates herself within a French autobiographical canon and yet she also challenges that very same canon in ways which will be explored in this study.[11]

Studying the autobiographies from perspectives beyond the confines of the French canon, which has tended to ignore the question of women's autobiography, has shed new light on the genre.[12] A

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cited by Hewitt, in *Autobiographical Tightropes* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), p. 3.

[9] The term is theorized in his influential essay, 'Autobiographie/Vérité/Psychanalyse', in *Autobiographiques: De Corneille à Sartre* (Paris: PUF, 1988), pp. 61-79.

[10] *Simone de Beauvoir: A Study of Her Writings* (London: Harrap, 1983), p. 44.

[11] By considering her positioning in France, Moi explores why Beauvoir's autobiographical project 'is doomed at the outset', in *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 70. See also Lejeune's discussion of her writings in terms of his 'pacte autobiographique' in *L'Autobiographie en France*, op. cit., p. 54.

[12] The exceptions are Lecarme and Lecarme-Tabone, *L'Autobiographie* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1997) and Didier, *L'Ecriture-femme* (Paris: PUF, 1981), who bring questions of gender to the fore.

number of important studies focus on the works in terms of existentialism or feminism. For the former, Sheringham and Keefe both recognize Beauvoir's talents as autobiographer, and incorporate her autobiographies into studies of French 'existentialist' autobiography or studies focusing on the existential self, Sheringham focusing on the first volume in conjunction with analysis of other works of the period by Sartre, Leduc and Genet.[13] For the latter, since the 1980s feminist readings have broadened the scope of autobiography studies, in particular within the Anglo-American sphere, and the term 'auto*gyn*ography' has emerged to draw attention to the presentation of a female autobiographical subject.[14] However, Beauvoir's writings find themselves in a rather ambiguous position: within women-authored critiques, she is often presented either as a spokeswoman for French feminist writers, or she is rejected, with the charge that her depictions of self are male-identified. Where Yanay traces the role of 'independence' in the autobiographies,[15] for example, Martha Evans's suggestive analysis of Beauvoir's 'double discourse' points to a divided female identity in the texts, as she argues that the writing is 'shadowed by another writing'.[16] Mary Evans assesses the extent to which Beauvoir underlines her *difference from* other women, and Heath presents the provocative thesis that Beauvoir 'did not write *as a woman*', but 'wrote and spoke the discourse of mastery'.[17] The divergent positions adopted here on issues surrounding identity and identification suggest that no

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[13] See Sheringham, *Autobiography: Devices and Desires* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), and *Autobiography and the Existential Self*, ed. by Keefe and Smyth (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1995).

[14] See Stanton, 'Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?', in *The Female Autograph: Theory and Practice of Autobiography*, ed. by D. Stanton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 3-20.

[15] See Yanay, 'Authenticity of Self-Expression: Reinterpretation of Female Independence Through the Writings of Simone de Beauvoir', *Women's Studies*, 17 (1990), 219-33.

[16] In 'Simone de Beauvoir: The Murderer', in *Masks of Tradition: Women and the Politics of Writing in 20th Century France* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1987), pp. 76-77, p. 225.

[17] See Evans, *Simone de Beauvoir* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), p. 91, and Heath, *Simone de Beauvoir* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p. 50, who combines reading for the 'feminine' with a more psychoanalytical approach (p. 14).

straightforward categorization of the texts is possible, or indeed, desirable.

This is reinforced further when we consider an important subset within feminist autobiography studies: psychoanalytical readings. A number of books and articles focus especially on the mother-daughter relation, and lend themselves to analysis of Beauvoir's positioning as a metaphorical mother, as a daughter, or *jeune fille rangée*, and as the writer of the scathing critique of maternity and motherhood in *Le Deuxième sexe*.[18] Critiques that engage with subconscious drives and desires do not necessarily lose sight of Beauvoir's role in the history, culture and politics of her time either. Moi represents an important new departure in critiques of the autobiographies: her socio-cultural contextualization of the works and her emphasis on the depiction of a 'situated self' combine with an analysis of the role of depression and melancholia in the autobiographical project.[19] This important critique has helped to undo much of the binary thinking about Beauvoir. Finally, recent studies have brought Foucauldian perspectives and gender theory to analysis of the autobiographies; these include Tidd's focus on the testimonial quality of Beauvoir's autobiographies and her role as female witness: witness to the Other, and witness to both a personal and collective history.[20] Likewise in France in recent years, there has been a resurgence of scholarly interest in Beauvoir's autobiographical writings.[21] To sum up, critiques in autobiography studies have

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[18] See Corbin, *The Mother Mirror: Self-Representation and the Mother-Daughter Relation in Colette, Simone de Beauvoir, and Marguerite Duras* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996) and Fell, *Liberty, Equality, Maternity* (Oxford: Legenda, 2002).

[19] *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*, op.cit., pp. 217-52. Other studies which consider Beauvoir within the sphere of feminist autobiography include Baisnée, *Gendered Resistance: The Autobiographies of Simone de Beauvoir, Maya Angelou, Janet Frame and Marguerite Duras* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1997) and Siegel, *Women's Autobiographies, Culture, Feminism* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999).

[20] Tidd, *Simone de Beauvoir: Gender and Testimony* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999). See also Fraser, *Identity without Selfhood: Simone de Beauvoir and Bisexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999) and Fishwick, *The Body in the Work of Simone de Beauvoir* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2002).

[21] This includes Lecarme-Tabone's recent critical edition of *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000); Rétif, *L'autre en miroir* (Paris: Harmattan, 1999); Guedj, *Le temps et le transcendant dans l'œuvre de Simone de Beauvoir* (Tubingen: G. Narr, 1998); Deguy, 'Simone de Beauvoir: la quête de l'enfance, le

highlighted well Beauvoir's shifting position within the French canon, and have raised questions about her status as a woman autobiographer, bringing attention to the representation and negotiation of public and private spheres in her work. Since a number of the studies focus exclusively on one volume, or define the autobiographies more narrowly as, for example, feminist or existentialist, less attention has been devoted to the intratextual narrative strategies themselves and to the differing portrayal of selves which span the autobiographical project in its entirety.

Specific critiques of Beauvoir's negotiations with autobiographical theory outlined above indicate a second and major consideration for any reappraisal of her autobiographical project: ideological perspectives. Critical thinking on Beauvoir has undoubtedly been informed by the intellectual, political and social landscapes of the periods in which critics have been writing, as studies on the critical reception of Beauvoir's œuvre by Moi and Fallaize demonstrate.[22] Moi's categorization of the various strands of criticism (catholic; existentialist/socialist; scholarly; popular; and feminist) is particularly revealing, and, as far as the autobiographies are concerned, Fallaize identifies the publication of the first volume as 'a major turning point in Beauvoir's literary image', and has argued that the publication of the memoirs had a negative effect on reception of her later works of fiction.[23] In this respect Moi's theorizing of 'the *personality topos*' as a *topos* which focuses not on her thoughts but on her 'looks, character, private life or morality' helps to explain why a significant number of reviews and articles in France focusing on Simone de Beauvoir as public persona has tended to overshadow critiques of the autobiographies themselves.[24]

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désir du récit, les intermittences du sens', op. cit.; Mannoni, 'Relation d'un sujet à sa propre vie', *Les Temps modernes*, 528 (1990), 57-77.

[22] See Moi, *Feminist Theory and Simone de Beauvoir* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), and Fallaize, 'Reception Problems for Women Writers: the Case of Simone de Beauvoir', in *Women and Representation*, ed. by D. Knight and J. Still (Women Teaching French Occasional Papers 3, Nottingham, 1995), pp. 43-56, and *Simone de Beauvoir: A Critical Reader* (London: Routledge, 1997).

[23] In *Feminist Theory and Simone de Beauvoir*, op. cit., p. 54, and 'Reception Problems for Women Writers: the Case of Simone de Beauvoir', op. cit., pp. 51-52.

[24] *Feminist Theory and Simone de Beauvoir*, op. cit., p. 27.

In a similar vein, the autobiographies have often served more as documentational secondary sources in monographs, biographies and works of general criticism on the author, whether as a means to explore the 'celebrity status' of the increasingly mythologized Sartre-Beauvoir existentialist partnership,[25] or to elicit biographical details to complement analysis of other texts. More recently, research by Le Dœuff and Ozouf has lifted Beauvoir out of this documentary/biographical framework.[26] The interest in Beauvoir's posthumous publications, which include two volumes of the *Lettres à Sartre*, the *Journal de guerre*, and more recently, the *Lettres à Nelson Algren: Un Amour Transatlantique, 1947-1964,* has undoubtedly influenced critics' responses, and discrepancies between the various retellings have provoked reassessments of the original volumes and resulted in the publication of a number of comparative readings.[27] Two particularly difficult questions which have emerged from readings of the letters concern Beauvoir's political commitment during the Occupation and her relationships with women.[28] In this respect, critics highlight again the dangers of accepting the autobiographies as faithful accounts, and remind us of the fact that any textual representation will by definition involve fabrication.[29] Articles which followed the publication in 1997 of the *Lettres à Nelson Algren* made great play of Beauvoir's love affair with the American writer Nelson Algren by depicting her in a supposedly new guise as

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[25] See Contat, 'Sartre/Beauvoir, légende et réalité d'un couple', in *Literature and its Cults*, ed. by P. Dávidházi and J. Karafiáth (Budapest: Argumentum, 1994), pp. 123-56.

[26] Le Dœuff, *L'Étude et le rouet* (Paris: Seuil, 1989) and Ozouf, *Les Mots des femmes* (Paris: Fayard, 1995).

[27] See, for example, Keefe, 'Autobiography and Biography: Simone de Beauvoir's Memoirs, Diary and Letters', in *Autobiography and the Existential Self*, op. cit., pp. 61-81, and Wilson, 'Daughters and Desire: Simone de Beauvoir's *Journal de Guerre*', in *Autobiography and the Existential Self*, op. cit., pp. 83-98.

[28] For a highly critical (and often refuted) view of the author's and Sartre's position during the Occupation see Gilbert Joseph's *Une si douce occupation* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1991). See also Rockmore's 'Simone de Beauvoir: Égoïsme ou solidarité?', *Simone de Beauvoir Studies*, 12 (1995), 73-79, and Galster's 'Simone de Beauvoir face à l'occupation allemande: Essai provisoire d'un réexamen à partir des écrits posthumes', *Contemporary French Civilisation*, 20, 2 (1996), 278-93.

[29] See Tidd, 'Telling the Truth in Simone de Beauvoir's Autobiography', *New Readings*, 2 (Cardiff: School of European Studies, University of Wales Cardiff, 1996), 7-19, Heath, *Simone de Beauvoir*, op. cit., pp. 48-49, and Keefe, *Autobiography and the Existential Self*, op. cit., p. 184.

'l'amoureuse' and 'l'autre Beauvoir'; headlines such as 'Simone côté coeur' indicated that the previous image of Beauvoir as intellectual blue-stocking was (perhaps temporarily) replaced by one of the desiring woman.

The final ideological shift in reception of Beauvoir's autobiographies which needs to be signalled is the study of the autobiographies as part of a broader project to promote Beauvoir as a philosopher in her own right. Contributors to this important rehabilitation of Beauvoir's thought include Edward and Kate Fullbrook, Le Dœuff, Holveck, Kruks, Lundgren-Gothlin, Simons, Bergoffen, Moi, Vintges and Pilardi, to name but a few.[30] Simons sums up the shift in feminist critiques of Beauvoir in her claim that 'the early period of uncritical feminist identification with Beauvoir is over'.[31] These critics call into question many assumptions made about the writer, her *œuvre*, and her place in canons of French literature and letters. It is in the space of territories opened up by the challenges of Anglo-American literary criticism and philosophical enquiry that the framework of this study is placed. To what extent does existentialism, for example, offer a suitable framework through which to explore Beauvoir's depictions of her autobiographical selves?

Having situated Beauvoir's autobiographical project within autobiography studies and within the context of changing French and Anglo-American ideological perspectives, some preliminary remarks about the relationship of autobiography to death, a relationship that is central to this study, will now be presented. The singularity of Simone de Beauvoir's autobiography, I shall argue, lies in the fact that it is her confrontations with death (both real and imagined) that shape her autobiographical project to the extent that her œuvre represents a prime example of an auto*thanato*graphy of the 20th century.

Death and Autothanatography

One might ask why 'thanatos' should take precedence over 'bios' in the analysis of autobiographical texts which do, after all, purport to document a life. With feminist viewpoints on autobiography in mind,

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30 See bibliography for full references.

31 *Feminist Interpretations of Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. by M. Simons (Pennsylvania: Penn State UP, 1995), p. 25.

and with the charge of re-evaluating the ways in which Beauvoir's autobiographies have been categorized, this study reviews the autobiographical project from the bifocal perspectives of 'existentialist' and 'feminist'. Autobiographers of the classic (male) canon and those who reject this 'standard' do nonetheless have points in common. They write near the end of their lives or after life-threatening crises. This 'existential' trigger provides an ideal ideological springboard to investigate Beauvoir – not just her political/private, feminist/non-feminist self, but the place of the absent self, or fear of not-self, which is the position of life against death. The basic premise here is that Beauvoir's considerable œuvre, read through the lens of auto*thanato*graphy, sheds light on her principal preoccupations and writing practice.

In general terms, Marks and Audet remain two of the major contributors of studies focusing on the significance of death in Beauvoir's *œuvre*, both treating the subject in a predominantly thematic way.[32] Audet uses the autobiographies primarily for documentational purposes in his literary study of the theme of death and focuses on Beauvoir's fiction; Marks argues that Beauvoir is obsessed by death, and that in her writing she evades confrontation with her own mortality. The size of her *œuvre* is presented as evidence of her desire to ward off death:

> The length of most of her books, the interminable descriptions and lists in the memoirs [...] and the refusal to cut or trim words, sentences and experiences can be explained by the obsession with death. To expurgate is to kill the self, to reduce it to oblivion. Things written down, both the facts of life and the feelings that accompany them, are a bulwark for the living against the inevitable end. Simone writes to consolidate the past and the present; to ward off the future.[33]

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[32] See Marks, *Encounters with Death* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1973), who devotes one chapter to the first three volumes of the autobiography; and Audet, *Simone de Beauvoir face à la mort* (Lausanne: L'Age d'homme, 1979).

[33] Ibid., p. 7. Similarly, Audet writes: '[...] c'est pourquoi Simone de Beauvoir semble pouvoir créer des mots à l'infini et ne jamais choisir ou élaguer, puisque retrancher un mot, c'est supprimer un des nombreux instants de sa vie et donc la raccourcir et hâter la mort [...]', op. cit., pp. 62-63.

Pursuing Marks' interest in Beauvoir's confrontations with death, Moi has argued that 'it is not death *per se* but depression that exerts pressure on Beauvoir's prose', and in her study she associates Beauvoir's desire to write about her life with what she calls an 'anxiety of separation' which produces an 'imagery of emptiness, death and engulfment'.[34] This study takes Marks' and Moi's important analyses as a starting point, but has as its principal focus the genre of autobiography itself: both death and representations of death are viewed here as being central to the structures, themes and style of the autobiographical project in its (fragmented) totality.

Why auto*thanato*graphy? Those who remind us of the central role that death assumes in Western society range from Montaigne, who, in his *Essais*, recognized the impossibility of separating life from death ('Vostre mort est une des pièces de l'ordre de l'univers: c'est une pièce de la vie du monde'),[35] to Baudrillard, whose analysis of death highlights its significance as one of the greatest taboos in Western culture:

> Toute notre culture n'est qu'un immense effort pour dissocier la vie de la mort, conjurer l'ambivalence de la mort au seul profit de la reproduction de la vie comme valeur, et du temps comme équivalent général. Abolir la mort, c'est notre phantasme qui se ramifie dans toutes les directions: celui de survie et d'éternité pour les religions, celui de vérité pour la science, celui de productivité et d'accumulation pour l'économie.[36]

The ongoing fascination with death and the self in literary and psychoanalytical fields is evident in the huge number studies devoted to the subject.[37] The relationship of death to the feminine also informs the ways in which death, as the 'unrepresentable', has been

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[34] *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*, op. cit., p. 269, pp. 224-25.

[35] In 'Que Philosopher, c'est apprendre à mourir', *Essais*, I, 20 (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1969), first published 1580, pp. 127-42 (p. 138).

[36] Baudrillard, *L'Échange symbolique et la mort* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 225.

[37] See, for example, *La Mort en toutes lettres*, ed. by G. Ernst (Nancy: Presses universitaires de Nancy, 1983); Braud, *La Tentation du suicide dans les écrits autobiographiques: 1930-1970* (Paris: PUF, 1992); Picard, *La Littérature et la mort* (Paris: PUF, 1995); Tambling, *Becoming Posthumous: Life and Death in Literary and Cultural Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2001), and further references in the bibliography.

conceptualized and idealized. In Bronfen's *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*, she provides ample evidence of the ways in which femininity and death may be 'ascribed the position of alterity' in an analysis which harks back to Beauvoir's argument in *Le Deuxième sexe* that 'Il est le Sujet […] elle est l'Autre' and which reminds us of the latter's emphasis on the ways in which women have been mythologized, whether as idealized bringers of life, or as death-dealing Medusas, positioned in opposition to the male subject.[38]

The psychoanalytical notion of the death drive might also provide further insights into the autobiographical act while posing potential problems for existentialist presentations of the self in the autobiographies. Freud's analysis contrasts sharply with Sartre's concept of self, for example, since for Sartre the individual is in a state of perpetual self-creation, an existent, not an essence; according to Sartre, there is no '*être*' to be uncovered by a process of introspection and self-analysis.[39] More generally, recent studies on autobiography have broadened the debate. For instance, Marcus associates Freud's death drive with the autobiographical act and refers to critics who, in focusing on the *impossibility* of writing the totality of one's life, have created theories of autobiography which take account of death as a prime motivating force in autobiographical discourse:

> Implicit in the search for totality in more traditional autobiographical criticism is the paradox that autobiography *ex hypothesi* cannot be written from the standpoint beyond the grave which would secure this totalizing vision of the life. By extension, for the autobiographer to aim at this totalizing vision would itself be to aim for death.
> [...]
> This theme recalls Freud's (and Schopenhauer's) account of the death-instinct or 'drive' as the attempt of the psyche 'to restore an earlier state of things'.[40]

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[38] *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. xiii. See also *Representations of Death*, ed. by E. Bronfen and S. Goodwin (Maryland: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1993).

[39] See Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, standard edition, 18 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1920), pp. 1-64 and Sartre, *L'Être et le néant* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943).

[40] *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1994), p. 208.

Marcus argues that negotiations of one's own death as unique experience represent a necessary stage in the constitution of the writing self as an individual subject.[41] She cites Derrida, De Man and Marin as the theorists who have 'constructed theories of autobiography in which death, as much as life, motivates or determines autobiographical discourse'.[42] This shall prove to be crucial in analyses of Beauvoir's autobiographies.

The term 'autothanatography' itself is also suggestive: used as a critical tool in autobiography studies, it has aroused considerable interest by theorists such as Derrida and Marin.[43] Maclean, in her study of writing and illegitimacy, has summed up Derrida's 'autography' as 'myths to live by', and his 'autothanatography' as 'myths to die by'.[44] She explores works which represent a series of *mises en scène* by authors who display a life for the purpose of creating a name, or envisage death as a kind of apotheosis. In a similar vein, Pontalis asks whether autobiography represents a 'registre obituaire et/ou acte de naissance?', arguing that, unlike Rousseau, modern autobiography is imbued with death ('tout empreinte par l'ombre de la mort').[45] Birth and death become inextricably linked in the autobiographical narrative. As Mijolla-Mellor suggests, 'L'auteur y accouche d'une image de lui-même, non pas dans une genèse socratique orientée vers la connaissance, mais à l'issue de l'engendrement réalisé avec la représentation de sa propre mort', and she describes the autobiographical act in existentialist terms as one which converts the past as a kind of *immanence* into a form of *pour-*

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[41] Ibid., p. 209.

[42] Ibid., p. 208.

[43] In Marin's *La Voix excommuniée* (Paris: Galilée, 1981), he refers to 'l'autothanatographie' in the context of Stendhal's *La Vie de Henry Brulard* (p. 37). Lukacher refers to Marin's use of the term in *Maternal Fictions: Stendhal, Sand, Rachilde, and Bataille* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 1994), p. 19. See also Derrida, *Otobiographies: l'enseignement de Nietzsche et la politique du nom propre* (Paris: Galilée, 1984); and Smith, *Derrida and Autobiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995).

[44] *The Name of the Mother: Writing Illegitimacy*, op. cit., p. 11.

[45] In 'Derniers, premiers mots', in *L'Autobiographie: VIes rencontres psychanalytiques d'Aix-en-Provence*, 1987 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1988), pp. 49-66 (p. 52, p. 59).

soi transcendence which defies mortality.[46] In this respect, Beauvoir's autobiographies would seem to present themselves as promising case studies, given the author's philosophical engagement with existentialism; her writing and re-writing of the major events of her life; and finally, her analysis of her relationships with others and negotiations of death in the past, the present, and, to some extent, beyond to a future unknown.

In this light, Lejeune's statement that, 'Au fond le véritable problème de l'autobiographe n'est pas de représenter de manière fidèle le temps d'une vie, mais de maîtriser ce temps immaîtrisable et de lutter contre la mort', takes on a particular significance.[47] One might ask whether Beauvoir's desire for literary posterity is any different from forefathers such as Rousseau or Stendhal? The writing project can be used to explore the experiences of life and death as 'unique' or conversely, universal, just as the autobiographical genre encompasses both convention and innovation, its writings emerging from the productive tension between the conventions of the genre and the author's particular innovations of it, a paradox analysed by Sheringham and highlighted here by Lejeune: 'Peut-être chaque vie est-elle singulière, mais dès qu'elle se raconte elle apparaît comme un fait de série, et le récit s'inscrit le plus souvent dans un horizon d'attente très convenu'.[48] Autobiographers are thus caught between the opposite poles of repetition and experimentation. Beauvoir's aim to universalize her experience in writing would appear to place her within the traditional parameters of the genre, yet her writing also brings her own concerns, in particular, a desire to communicate with her readers, as woman writer. This stance is reflected in a lecture delivered in Japan in 1966: 'Il s'agit au contraire dans l'autobiographie de partir de la singularité de ma vie pour retrouver

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[46] 'Survivre à son passé', *L'Autobiographie: VIes rencontres psychanalytiques d'Aix-en-Provence*, op. cit., p. 105. She writes: '[...] le désir autobiographique me semble participer de cette illusion selon laquelle nous aurions à reprendre ce qui se perd hors de nous et à devenir "pour-soi" cet "en-soi" que constitue notre passé' (p. 107).

[47] In 'Peut-on innover en autobiographie?', in *L'Autobiographie: VIes Rencontres Psychanalytiques d'Aix-en-Provence*, op. cit., 67-100 (p. 93).

[48] Ibid., p. 67. Sheringham, in *French Autobiography: Devices and Desires,* op. cit., stresses the intertextual chain from Rousseau, using the framework of innovation versus convention (p. 16).

une généralité, celle de mon époque, celle du milieu où je vis'.[49] Discussing the most intimate aspects of her life offers the means to bring her closer to others, as she goes on to argue:

> [...] parler des expériences les plus intimes que nous pouvons avoir comme la solitude, l'angoisse, la mort des gens que nous aimons, notre propre mort, c'est au contraire une manière de nous rapprocher, de nous aider et de rendre le monde moins noir. Je crois que c'est là une des tâches absolument irremplaçables et essentielles de la littérature: nous aider à communiquer les uns avec les autres en ce que nous avons de plus solitaire et par quoi nous sommes liés le plus intimement les uns aux autres.[50]

In fact, she had exhorted her readers in the preface to the third volume of autobiography to view her work as a totalized whole ('[…] j'avertis que sa vérité ne s'exprime dans aucune de ses pages mais seulement dans leur totalité', *FC*, I, p. 10). This intratextual perspective permits analysis to go beyond the chronological presentation of a life in a given period to address the thematic, structural and generic concerns which are developed through the (auto)biographical texts, from the *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* to *La Cérémonie des adieux*. Existentialist, feminist, documentary, and 'mythologizing' narratives are interwoven in the autobiographies, and these will be explored in the chapters that follow. Read through the lens of *thanatos* rather than *bios*, they present themselves as distinct writing strategies which reveal the author's negotiations with death in all its guises. This study focuses on the four volumes of Beauvoir's autobiographical œuvre, and on the two works of (auto)biography on the deaths of Beauvoir's mother and Sartre respectively. The latter engage with a number of recurring questions broached by the author later in life and enable common threads of her enterprise to be traced. My aim, then, is to explore the autobiographical *œuvre* in the context of an autobiographical project focused on self-representation, and always destined, unlike the diaries

[49] 'Mon expérience d'écrivain', in *Les Écrits de Simone de Beauvoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), pp. 439-57 (p. 449). See also her reference to death as both unique and collective experience ('Je mourrai d'une mort qui est absolument unique pour moi, mais c'est la même chose pour chacun de vous'), in *Que peut la littérature*? (Meaux: Union Générale d'Editions, 1965), pp. 78-79.

[50] Ibid., p. 457.

and journals, for an audience.[51] It will become apparent that the many shifts, changes and reworkings across the œuvre are not clear-cut and hence the volume by volume approach of this study allows for 'reversals' or conflicting perspectives to be analysed. This approach has also been chosen in order to illustrate the accumulative strategy which is central to the author's 'autothanatographical' drive under examination here. Although chronologically *Une mort très douce* precedes *Tout compte fait*, it has been paired with *La Cérémonie des adieux* in order to focus in the first part of the study on the presentation of self in the four volumes of autobiography proper, and then, in the second part, to draw comparisons between the two more biographical works.

The first chapter begins by exploring *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*. It considers the relationship between this text and the (male) French autobiographical canon, and explores the complexities of applying 'existentialist' or 'feminist' definitions to the volume. Beauvoir's representations of women and death, her putting to death of others, and her borrowing of others' deaths determine the focus. Would 'ghostwriting' be an appropriate term for this writing of, and through, male and female death? I will argue that there is not just one dutiful daughter in this volume, but two, as Beauvoir writes her own life in the shadow of her alter ego, Zaza.

The second chapter focuses on the first half of the *Force de l'âge/Force des choses* diptych: this is the moment when the narrator leaves home, embarks on a life with Sartre, and has to confront the horrific reality of war. The setting up of *La Force de l'âge* as a model of existentialist autobiography emphasizes the narrator's optimistic positioning in the world as *pour-soi* identity, but can be contrasted with 'fractures' in the text which allow an autothanatographical process to emerge.[52] The depictions of private and political 'pactes' and the writing of public and private deaths offer key insights into this

[51] It is outwith the scope of this project to consider Beauvoir's diaries and journals in detail. See, for example, articles and studies by Davison, Miller, Poisson, Idt, Van den Hoven, Marks, Simons, Jardine, Tidd, Kadish and Poirot-Delpech, listed in the bibliography.

[52] The term *pour-soi* is used in Sartrean existentialism in opposition to *en-soi* to define a state of being conscious of one's own existence, as a state of being-for-oneself as opposed to being-in-itself.

autobio(thanato)graphical project. Illustrations of attempts to 'existentialize' a life then prompt discussion of conceptualizations of self and other in the text: can they adequately express Beauvoir's experiences and sense of identity? In addition to these questions, explorations of the limits of gender and genre combine in analysis of the function of the travelogue and *journal intime* in the autobiography.

La Force des choses will then be the subject of the third chapter as the effects of the Liberation on the narrator's sense of self are explored. The author's place in history is examined in this volume in terms of the tracing of a *pour-soi* identity which is further problematized in this second half of the diptych by negotiations with an ageing, gendered self. A rhetoric of death increasingly infiltrates the narrative, culminating in the famous 'flouée' passage at the end of the book in which the narrator expresses a sense of disappointment and bitterness about her life to the reader. The increasingly fragmented genres in the text reveal the competing preoccupations of the existentialist and social critic to record the events of an era and of the autobiographer to explore more personal concerns. Beauvoir's stark confrontation with her embodied self in *La Force des choses* finds a parallel in *Une mort très douce,* her moving account of the death of her mother, which was published just a year later. The latter echoes a number of the preoccupations raised in the autobiography and presents itself as a prime example of (auto)thanatography to be explored subsequently.

Tout compte fait will be analysed in the fourth chapter as both resolution and starting point of the autothanatographical project. How does Simone de Beauvoir deal with her increasingly public persona? As autobiographer, how does she solve the problem of concluding, and bring together the four volumes in this rewriting and reconstruction of a life? Does the desire to universalize her experience place her in line with her male predecessors? Her mode of writing as essayist and re-reader of her own *Deuxième sexe* will be discussed in order to highlight the writing strategies in *Tout compte fait* which reinforce the author's identity as an intellectual in the public sphere, and which contrast with narratives articulating a more private, intimate voice. Given the title of this volume of the autobiography, it is perhaps surprising that it is indeed followed by further 'adieux': *La Cérémonie des adieux*, published in 1981. The question whether this

account of the death of Sartre represents a certain resistance to closure of the autobiographical œuvre will be considered in the final chapter.

Indeed, writing against death explicitly via the Other is the focus of the closing chapters of this study. In *Une mort très douce*, Mme de Beauvoir's degeneration and death are recounted in moving, and often disturbing, detail, and the experience of revisiting the mother's life results in a depiction of her that is very different from her portrayal in the *Mémoires*. Her death sharpens the narrator's confrontations with mortality and the text represents a re-assessment and re-evaluation of the mother-daughter relationship in the aftermath of the mother's death. The enactment of an identification between mother and daughter motivates a reading that stresses the text's reparative function. Here, the resurrection of the mother's life and death in the text highlights the writing of thanatography as a dialogue with death and the dead.

Likewise, in *La Cérémonie des adieux*, the narrator explores questions of life and death through the (auto)biographical genre. In this case, the final years of Sartre's life come under scrutiny. Love story or symbolic violence? In this final chapter depictions of Sartre are examined with a view to highlighting the multiple and sometimes conflicting representations of him. In this text, writing for posterity reveals Beauvoir's negotiations of death and mortality via an abject Other. The process, it will be argued, foregrounds the narrator's changing sense of self in a text that juxtaposes a nostalgia for youth (and fantasy of transcendence) with the reality of an embodied, 'situated' self.

These readings of Simone de Beauvoir's autobiographical œuvre constitute a detailed analysis of the author's prime concerns as she evaluated and re-evaluated her life and negotiated questions of death, dying and mortality. The sheer volume of her writings testifies to her indefatigable questioning of the nature of existence and her personal and public engagement in the world over the best part of a century. It is hoped that this study will contribute to recent re-evaluations of Beauvoir's œuvre, and, in particular, open up further avenues for research on auto*thanato*graphical texts.

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CHAPTER I

Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée

Published in 1958, *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* is the first and best-known volume of Simone de Beauvoir's autobiographical *œuvre*, and it has attracted the greatest critical response and the most diverse range of interpretations. Readings, especially by feminist critics, stress Beauvoir's revolt against the codes and conventions of her bourgeois upbringing, and highlight the necessity of education as a means of female emancipation.[1] Reflecting interest in psychoanalytical and deconstructionist approaches, more recent studies have focused on mother-daughter relationships.[2] These explore the impact of theories of nurturing on the development and depiction of the female self. Rather than viewing autobiography as a canvas on which to paint the self as autonomous identity, such readings emphasize instead the importance of relationships with others, particularly the mother-daughter bond, and ask whether the female self might be analysed more judiciously in the context not of independence and autonomy but in terms of reciprocity and interconnection.

Questions of identity and selfhood are especially pertinent since this volume spans the childhood of the author. Its detailed description of the early years can be understood in terms of a symbolic recreation of the author's development, analysed from the distance of middle age. In *La Vieillesse*, Beauvoir's study of old age, she commented on the importance which the adult self attaches to the early years, writing that childhood offers crucial insights into the development of the individual: 'C'est surtout son enfance qui revient hanter le vieillard: on sait depuis Freud l'importance – que Montaigne

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[1] See, for example, Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Biography* (London: Johnathan Cape, 1990), p. 408; Evans, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Feminist Mandarin* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1985), pp. 1-2, 10-11; Okely, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Re-reading* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), p. 22.

[2] See, in particular, Portuges, 'Attachment and Separation in *The Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*', *Yale French Studies*, 72 (1986), 107-18; Patterson, *Simone de Beauvoir and the Demystification of Motherhood* (Michigan: Ann Arbor, 1989); Fell, *Liberty, Equality, Maternity in Beauvoir, Leduc and Ernaux* (Oxford: Legenda, 2003); Corbin, op. cit.

pressentait – des toutes premières années quant à la formation de l'individu et de son univers'.[3] Examining childhood scenes reveals the narrator's victory over bourgeois convention, and the dynamics between family members. These stylized scenes also expose, through the depictions of the narrator's younger self, the origins of the alienated and divided identity which emerges. The narrator oscillates between identification with her mother and father and slowly has to reconcile and revise her conceptualizations of the mind/body relationship in the context of her confrontations with an embodied self. Since, in different ways, family members are shown to shape the narrator's sense of self, and descriptions of deaths of family members force the narrator to recognize the fragility of the human condition, the first part of this chapter will be devoted to the narrative of the 'Family Romance'.

Yet the focus of critics has not been restricted solely to the young narrator's relationships with her immediate family. Julienne-Caffié refers to the portraits of Simone's childhood friend, Zaza, and her cousin Jacques as '[...] le contrepoint nécessaire de celui de l'entourage familial que l'arrivée de Sartre va définitivement supplanter'.[4] Within the sphere of the extended family, it could be argued that the influence of Jacques has been rather neglected in favour of mother/daughter readings. He serves as a link between the tight-knit Beauvoir family and the world of education and emancipation. Beyond the family sphere, the portrayal of Sartre has tended to dominate readings which claim that the main thrust of the book is concerned with this relationship and the narrator's conversion to existentialism. However, a tendency to idealize the Beauvoir-Sartre partnership has been challenged by a number of critics including Moi and Kaufmann. Moi examines Beauvoir's own blindspots in the presentation of the partnership and Kaufmann refers to the construction of 'automythologies' about the Sartre-Beauvoir relationship.[5] With these perspectives in mind, I propose to study the depiction of the narrator's friendship with Sartre as counterpoint to the failed romantic relationship with Jacques, in order to examine how

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[3] *La Vieillesse* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p. 392.

[4] *Simone de Beauvoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), p. 170.

[5] See Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 30, and Kaufmann, 'Autobiographical Intersexts: les mots de deux enfants rangés', *L'Esprit créateur*, 29, 4 (Winter 1989), 21-32 (p. 21, p. 31).

narratives engaging with different philosophical approaches are shaped by the narrator's existential questioning.

A further counterpoint to the depiction of the Beauvoir-Sartre partnership is the relationship between Simone and Zaza (Elisabeth Lacoin, known as Elisabeth Mabille in the memoirs), the two *jeunes filles rangées*, especially given the depiction of Zaza's death at the end of the *Mémoires*.[6] Marks has argued that, in general terms, Simone's encounters with death (whether the death of God, of Zaza, of Louise's baby, or of family members), enable the author herself to evade death.[7] However, the text not only presents encounters with actual deaths: death and representations of death function on a symbolic and structural level too. The role of Beauvoir's childhood friend is particularly important as Zaza appears to be the archetypal 'jeune fille rangée' who suffers for her obedience to codes and conventions. Her narrative will be studied as a crucial, sometimes overlooked, feature of the text. As Hewitt has suggested, the title of the *Memoires* is itself ambiguous: is there really only one 'dutiful daughter'?[8]

Several studies have already highlighted Zaza's role in the context of the mother-daughter relationship and wider questions of nurturing. For example, Lacoste has suggested that Zaza is more alternate role model than sacrificial victim, with her 'joy of loving' being the most authentic means of circumventing patriarchy.[9] In contrast, Hughes argues that the Zaza association is less than liberationist, and that Zaza 'is not a *replacement* for the mother', but

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[6] I explore this question more fully in 'Death of the Maidens: *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*', *Simone de Beauvoir Studies*, 13 (1996), 126-36.

[7] In *Encounters with Death* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1973). she devotes chapter five to the study of the death of Anne-Zaza. Arguing that they are linked to specific causes, Marks compares these encounters with those in the fiction, notably *Le Sang des autres*, to suggest that this serves as a means for the narrator to avoid confronting her own mortality: '[...] poverty, political action, the Resistance movement; by refusing to generalize – all men die – or to identify – the narrator never thinks of himself as mortal – Simone de Beauvoir has led her characters, her readers, and herself astray', ibid., p. 40. Both Marks and Audet consider Zaza's death in their studies, but neither focuses specifically on the relationship between the autobiographical act and death.

[8] See *Autobiographical Tightropes* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), pp. 35-36.

[9] In 'Zaza's Way: Sacrificial Victim or Alternative Role Model?', *Simone de Beauvoir Studies*, 9 (1992), 87-97 (p. 96). See also Portuges, op. cit.

rather is a sort of 'phallic mother' whose presence has to be removed in order for the narrator to attain a certain autonomy.[10] Here, rather than focusing on the role of Zaza in terms of the mother/daughter dynamic, the lives and deaths of the two 'jeunes filles rangées' shall be explored in parallel. If we examine their interchanging and opposing roles, we witness the deaths of not one but two *jeunes filles rangées*: Zaza dies in childhood and Simone increasingly resists the pressure to adopt stereotyped feminine traits.

After discussion of the network of family relationships in the text, part two of this chapter, 'Living Others' Deaths', examines these textual representations of the deaths of others. These can be shown to bring the narrator an awareness of self and a better understanding of others, and to play an important role in the forging of her writerly self.[11] Readings that highlight negotiations of death also offset existentialist readings that stress the young woman's liberation from her background, her meteoric rise in the academic world, and her successful partnership with Sartre.

The third part of this chapter then focuses on the structures of autobiography as genre. To what extent is the term 'rangée' applicable to the text itself? In order to answer this question, the text's complex relationship to definitions of 'standard' autobiography and neighbouring genres needs to be considered; these include the *Bildungsroman*, the 'récit d'enfance', the 'récit de vocation' and the 'récit existentialiste'. Classifying *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* as 'existentialist autobiography', Sheringham has categorized the narrative as 'consistently linear and chronological', as less sophisticated than *Les Mots*, writing that 'the sense of a complex, dialectical structure, which dominates *Les Mots*, is lacking', and that 'the issues of change, conversion or self-transformation [...] do not arise in the *Mémoires*: a continuous thread links writer and protagonist

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[10] In 'Murdering the Mother: Simone de Beauvoir's *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*', *French Studies*, 58, 2 (April 1994), 174-83 (p. 178, p. 179, 181).

[11] Hughes has touched on this in her study of *Le Sang des autres* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow French and German Publications, 1995), arguing that for both *Le Sang des autres* and *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, 'the death of the Other is represented as a catalytic and highly formative phenomenon' (p. 47).

[...]'.[12] Yet on the other hand, Labovitz's identification of a 'double-voiced discourse', both muted and dominant, marks a different departure in readings of the autobiography and the genre of the female *Bildungsroman* and introduces a further perspective to be explored.[13]

A second related question to be examined within the context of autobiography as genre concerns the function of intertextuality in the *Mémoires*. While critics such as Hughes and Labovitz have identified literary references in the work, the presence of autobiographical intertexts from predecessors merits further exploration.[14] These include references drawn not only from the French canon but also from a wider range of early twentieth-century autobiographical writings. Do these *voix d'outre-tombe* act as mirroring or deflecting devices for Beauvoir's autobiographical project?[15] The allusions to earlier literary 'jeunes filles rangées', 'jeunes filles mortes', and lost 'compagnons' would seem to mirror portrayals of Beauvoir's autobiographical self, and invite further analysis.

Finally, consideration of the specificity of the autobiographical genre necessitates an analysis of narrative voice and Beauvoir's particular textual strategies. In *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* the older narrator positions herself as judge; she is the super-ego who opposes the young Simone, and this older and wiser narrator provides a different perspective from which to view the younger autobiographical selves resurrected in the text. The older narrator directs the reader to her own *bildung*, a process of enlightenment in large part shaped by the drive to find coherence and consolation from the writing project.[16] Viewed in the context of women's autobiography, the text reveals not only Beauvoir's narratives of self

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[12] In *French Autobiography: Devices and Desires* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 220-21.

[13] In *The Myth of the Heroine: the Female Bildungsroman in the 20th Century* (New York: Peter Lang, 1986), p. 257.

[14] See Hughes, 'Murdering the Mother: Simone de Beauvoir's *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*', op. cit., and Labovitz, op. cit.

[15] This term is being used with Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1948), first published 1849-50, in mind.

[16] Hewitt argues that 'de Beauvoir takes refuge in the creation of a past over which she has supreme control', in *Autobiographical Tightropes*, op. cit., p. 34.

but also offers an alternative mode of self-expression for the author via a shadow 'Other'. Rather than focusing on the author's guilt about the death of Zaza as a strategy to evade death, attention will be drawn to its powerful force as both source of nostalgia and inspiration for writing, and as catalyst for the birth of an autobiographical writing self.

The Family Romance

In the memoirs, various ideological systems are presented and some are successively rejected: Catholicism, associated with Simone de Beauvoir's mother and the bourgeois Mabille family; agnosticism, associated with her father; nihilism, represented by Jacques; and existentialism, associated with Sartre.[17] Initially, a series of personal crises punctuates the narrative depicting family life. As the young Simone successively rejects identification with a number of family members, the reader is presented not so much with a 'jeune fille rangée' but with a series of portrayals of self indicating the existence of a divided identity at odds with traditional conceptualizations of a singular and autonomous autobiographical self. Indeed, one of the most significant symbolic deaths in the family sphere is, I shall argue, the death of the 'jeune fille rangée' herself.

The older narrator, writing in 1958, mocks the portrayal of her younger self as 'l'Unique' (*MJFR*, p. 82), or 'hors série' (*MJFR*, p. 125), and her sense of alienation from what might be understood as any 'authentic' self is highlighted in her description of the ways in which the young child plays out conventional roles, or 'puériles prétentions' (*MJFR*, p. 86) for others: '[...] j'acceptais leurs verdicts tout en me voyant avec d'autres yeux que les leurs. La vérité de mon être leur appartenait encore autant qu'à moi. [...] il fallait leur dissimuler les trompeuses apparences' (*MJFR*, p. 151). Like the young Poulou in Sartre's *Les Mots*, being true to oneself yet satisfying the expectations of others is shown to create a fracturing of self. Within this framework Beauvoir's apprehension of a divided identity becomes veiled in existentialist terminology – 'On aurait dit que j'existais de deux manières; entre ce que j'étais pour moi, et ce que

[17] I explore the author's rejection of religious faith in the autobiographies in more detail in 'Writing the Atheist Self: the Autothanatographies of Simone de Beauvoir', in *(Un)faithful Texts? Religion and Francophone Literature, from the 1780s to the 1980s* (New Orleans: University Press of the South, 2000), pp. 173-85.

j'étais pour les autres [...]' (*MJFR*, p. 194) – and the interpretive grid of existentialism encourages the reader to associate inauthentic role-playing with the concept of *mauvaise foi* ('bad faith').[18]

This non-coincidence of the 'je' and the 'moi' becomes more acute as the 'jeune fille rangée' is forced to grow up, and, in a wider context, as the comforts of her bourgeois lifestyle become threatened when family fortunes dwindle. The narrator attributes physical and intellectual crises in her childhood to changes in financial circumstances and the deaths of older family members. A sense of disintegration is also exacerbated, however, by the scenes of conflict which are witnessed by the young girl between her father and mother, who represent very different value systems. Repetition in the text of Simone's sentiments three times on a single page has the effect of amplifying her reactions to eschatological proportions: '[...] je crus que la terre avait basculé sous mes pieds' (*MJFR*, p. 24); 'l'univers chavira' (*MJFR*, p. 25); '[...] le ciel se mélange à l'enfer, les ténèbres se confondent avec la lumière. Je sombrai dans le chaos qui précéda la Création' (*MJFR*, p. 25). The rather melodramatic language used by the narrator suggests that these moments are to be registered as turning points in her own self-development.[19] Beauvoir's decision to follow an academic path is commonly attributed to this split identity, and the consequences of parental influence are evident in the narrator's denial of her physical being and female gender: 'Dans mon univers, la chair n'avait pas droit à l'existence' (*MJFR*, p. 81); 'La passivité à laquelle mon sexe me vouait, je la convertissais en défi' (*MJFR*, p. 80). Here, overshadowing a purely Œdipal framework of

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[18] The existentialist term 'mauvaise foi', as defined by Matthews in *Twentieth Century French Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996), is '[...] the cultivated illusion by which we seek to conceal from ourselves the uncomfortable ambiguity of our position – that we must and can choose, and yet that the only real choices we can make are those presented to us by the situation in which we happen to find ourselves' (p. 68).

[19] Moi has interpreted the parental conflicts from a Lacanian perspective: 'Often linked to depression or anxiety, such crises would seem to be the product of a conflict related to the difficulty of leaving the maternal universe of oral satisfaction and narcissistic omnipotence and entering into the paternal realm of the Law, language and sexuality. According to Beauvoir, the tension between the maternal and paternal worlds, between her mother's Catholic moralism and her father's atheism, is also responsible for her choice of becoming an intellectual', in *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*, op. cit., p. 26.

the mother-father-daughter triangle, indicated by such phrases as, '[...] Mes sentiments pour mon père s'exaltèrent' (*MJFR*, p. 98) and 'Ma véritable rivale, c'était ma mère' (*MJFR*, p. 149), a major difficulty is posed for the author in expressing herself as *embodied* since this requires a reconciliation of mind and body, two concepts which, for her, have become dissociated.

Simone's father raises her as he might have done his first son, by encouraging independence and serious learning, while also nurturing his own interests in his daughter.[20] Initially this is successful and the young pre-pubescent daughter idolizes her father. However, as soon as the young girl enters puberty, a stage which inspires mixed feelings ('J'enviais aux "grandes jeunes filles" leur liberté; mais je répugnais à l'idée de voir mon torse se ballonner […]' (*MJFR*, p. 139)), the nature of their relationship changes. The onset of menstruation is presented as a turning point in the death of the 'jeune fille', and, confronted by an image of her embodied self, she expresses a certain horror: 'En face de mon père je me croyais un pur esprit: j'eus horreur qu'il me considérât soudain comme un organisme' (*MJFR*, p. 141). Emphasis on their cerebral relationship is lost and, categorized now as female, she compares herself to her sister; internalizing feminine ideals, she focuses on her relative unattractiveness: '[...] mal attifée, pataude, j'hésitais avec disgrâce entre la fillette et la femme' (*MJFR*, p. 142); 'Mon corps changeait; mon existence aussi: le passé me quittait' (*MJFR*, p. 144). The special relationship with the father becomes a point of reference and source of nostalgia for the young woman who fears becoming trapped in a 'destin de femme'; such a destiny highlights, in her eyes, the very worst aspects of her mother's existence, as housewife and as devout Catholic.[21] It is a destiny that is contrasted with the intellectual preoccupations of her agnostic father.

The narrator's decision to write a diary at this stage could be interpreted as a desire to seek out a reflection of self which confirms an intellectual more than an embodied identity: '[...] désormais, je

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[20] See Moi's analysis of Beauvoir's education and upbringing in *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of An Intellectual Woman*, ibid., pp. 15-72.

[21] This is associated with domestic chores and repetition as 'ces heures indéfiniment recommencées et qui ne mènent nulle part [...]' (*MJFR*, p. 144).

prétendis me dédoubler, me regarder, je m'épiai; dans mon *journal* je dialoguai avec moi-même. [...] je n'existais que par moi, et pour moi. Je me félicitai d'un exil qui m'avait chassée vers de si hautes joies [...]' (*MJFR*, p. 264). Moreover, this conflict between the narrator's desire to remain ungendered child, and her parents' projection of female attributes and expectations upon her, reveals the divided identity of the autobiographical subject: 'Mais alors je me sentais radicalement coupée d'autrui; je regardais dans la glace celle que leurs yeux voyaient: ce n'était pas moi; moi, j'étais absente; absente de partout; où me retrouver?' (*MJFR*, p. 268). Leading a divided existence, for self and for others, is stretched to the point of non-identity, presented in terms of a 'nothingness' of self: '[...] un petit singe; sans aucun doute, c'est ainsi que ces beaux enfants me voyaient; ils me méprisaient: pire, ils m'ignoraient. Je contemplai, désemparée, leur triomphe et *mon néant*' (*MJFR*, p. 86) (my emphasis). The inevitability of the death of the 'jeune fille rangée' is implied, with identity conveyed as a *process* of identifications rather than as fixed image:

> Je regardais le fauteuil de maman et je pensais: 'Je ne pourrai plus m'asseoir sur ses genoux'. Soudain l'avenir existait; il me changerait en une autre qui dirait moi et ne serait plus moi. J'ai pressenti tous les sevrages, les reniements, les abandons, *et la succession de mes morts* [...] (*MJFR*, p. 13) (my emphasis).

This sense of alienation, the apprehension of a lost golden age of childhood, and the destabilizing effects of adolescence all underline the descriptions of the narrator's distance both from her family and the world around her. She describes herself in terms of separation and isolation: '[...] séparée de ma famille [...] je ne savais plus comment me situer, ni ce que j'étais venue faire sur terre' (*MJFR*, p. 86). These descriptions of puberty coincide with numerous references highlighting the perceived irreversibility of her condition: 'Je continuais à grandir et je me savais condamnée à l'exil' (*MJFR*, p. 13).

Furthermore, this *physical* crisis, recounted via images of dying and death, is echoed by a spiritual one: the narrator's revolt against the religious faith inherited from her mother, and its accompanying inculcation of a sense of duty. She criticizes hypocrisy

and misogyny within institutionalized religion, her portrayal marked by a specific dislike of the submissive role assigned to women within the Church in general, and the experience of her own mother's fate in particular. A distanced ironic narrator recounts early spiritual crises, recreating her younger self's romanticized vision of faith: '[...] contre la mort, la foi me défendait: je fermerais les yeux, et en un éclair, les mains neigeuses des anges me transporteraient au ciel' (*MJFR*, p. 67). Obsessive fears intrude on the subsequent narrative as the narrator confronts her mortality:

> Un soir pourtant, le néant m'a transie. [...] Je me rendais compte avec angoisse que cette absence de mémoire équivalait au néant; tout se passait comme si [...] je n'avais pas existé du tout. Il fallait *combler cette faille*. [...] Du moins avais-je émergé des ténèbres; mais les choses autour de moi, y restaient enfouies [...] Dans les siècles révolus, dans le silence des êtres inanimés je pressentais ma propre absence: je pressentais la vérité, fallacieusement conjurée, de ma mort (*MJFR*, pp. 68-69) (my emphasis).[22]

The rejection of a religious self is also presented as a moment of liberation in the same way that a sense of repugnance with a physical self denies any specifically female destiny. Believing that her new stance has liberated her from her sex and from determinist and patriarchal religious conventions, both of which are represented by her mother, the narrator writes: 'J'éprouvai même un grand soulagement à me retrouver, affranchie de mon enfance et de mon sexe, en accord avec les libres esprits que j'admirais' (*MJFR*, p. 191).

The presence of images of death in both physical and spiritual crises of identity, explored above, is further intensified by the narrator's witnessing of the actual deaths of family members. The reader's attention is drawn to a number of these key incidents; for instance, the shock of witnessing death in infancy contrasts with the less unexpected death of Simone's grandfather. The death of their maid Louise's baby shakes the young girl's sense of security and mirrors the Beauvoir family's own changing fortunes: '[…] c'était la première fois que je voyais face à face le malheur. [...] Je ne pensais

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[22] See also, 'Un après-midi à Paris, je réalisai que j'étais condamnée à mort. [...] Plus que la mort elle-même je redoutais cette épouvante qui bientôt serait mon lot, et pour toujours' (*MJFR*, p. 192).

pas seulement à l'enfant mort, mais au corridor du sixième' (*MJFR*, p. 183). The fragility of existence is reinforced by the grandfather's degeneration and imminent death, and the declining success of his family business (*MJFR*, p. 207). At the head of the family, his death symbolizes the fragmentation of family structures, and in the text long descriptions convey the dying process, the family's reversal of fortune, and the author's increasing pessimism: 'Bon-papa mourut à la fin de l'automne, après une interminable agonie [...]. Cette livrée funèbre m'enlaidissait, m'isolait et il me sembla qu'elle me vouait définitivement à une austérité qui commençait à me peser' (*MJFR*, p. 241). This is also true for her Uncle Gaston whose death brings home to the narrator her own mortality, in this her first face-to-face witnessing of death in its brute physical reality:

> [...] je vis pour la première fois de ma vie mourir quelqu'un [...]. Il agonisa toute une nuit. [...] Il râlait, et il vomissait des choses noires. [...] Irréparable; irrémédiable: ces mots martelaient ma tête, à la faire éclater; et un autre leur répondait: inévitable (*MJFR*, p. 298).

The depiction of such deaths in the *Mémoires* highlights Beauvoir's unforgettable confrontations with mortality, and her need to echo this irreparable and inevitable fact in writing. Although her other grandfather's death does not elicit such a strong emotional response – 'il était très âgé, sa mort me semblait naturelle et je ne m'en attristai pas' (*MJFR*, p. 443) –, it is juxtaposed all the same with the end of her relationship with Jacques, symbolizing the end of an episode of the author's life: 'Une dépêche, le dimanche, m'annonça la mort de grand-père; décidément, mon passé se défaisait' (*MJFR*, p. 446).

Thus, within the dramatized family narrative, Simone's identification with her father as positive role model is undermined when the 'jeune fille' ceases to exist, and the narrator has to confront the facts of her gendered existence. Early experiences of conflict and death sharpen her sense of alienation from those around her. Conveyed by the language of spiritual crisis, the older, distanced narrator brings the suffocating, and at the same time isolating, experiences of the young girl to the fore. Death as real experience and as metaphysical crisis, far more than 'joie de vivre', pervades the narrative of the 'Family romance', preparing the reader for the thanatographical 'crises' to follow. The life cycle is reversed as death

invades youth, in terms of actual encounters with death and as metaphor for a youth spent in suffocating confinement: 'Surtout, je *crevais de santé, de jeunesse*, et je restais confinée à la maison et dans des bibliothèques [...]' (*MJFR*, p. 361) (my emphasis).

Living Others' Deaths

The end of childhood security comes with the narrator's rejection of her religious mother and agnostic father as role models. Reaching out beyond the confines of the family, and thrust into the arms of the teachers at the 'cours Désir', the narrator writes that her childhood has now come to an end: 'Dans ce triste corridor, je réalisai obscurément que mon enfance prenait fin' (*MJFR*, p. 173). Her reliance on a newly-created adoptive 'family' provides the opportunity for her to explore different frameworks or philosophies which might bring meaning to her existence. These include Romanticism and the 'culte du moi' via the female heroine, and nihilism and male heroism via the 'Jacques narrative', finally culminating in the narrator's rejection of these stances and denial of any religious or overtly gendered position in favour of an intellectual positioning as writer and companion to Sartre. Indeed, the narrative which traces her intellectual development is forceful. Yet it finds its counterpoint in the narratives plotting the deaths of Jacques and Zaza; these structures inform a wider autothanatographical project. The narrator confronts the hard facts of her existence beyond the immediate family circle through this surrogate brother and sister; she examines their lives to reflect on her own stages of development, thus creating different life *cycles* of her successive autobiographical selves which then contrast with the downward spiral of Jacques's and Zaza's lives.

Jacques bridges the gulf between Simone's family and the outside world. As her cousin, he not only takes on the protective role of an older and more knowledgeable brother – 'un grand frère un peu lointain' (*MJFR*, p. 289) – but he is also Beauvoir's first potential romantic lover. In this unthreatening sphere he offers an alternative 'safe' mode of masculine identification which eludes the physical dimension, as the narrator confides: '[...] jamais il ne m'inspira le moindre trouble ni l'ombre d'un désir' (*MJFR*, p. 289). The portrayal of Jacques suggests an archetypal romantic nihilist hero: this is a stance which involves a rejection of the world of writing and activity, and which is fuelled by Simone's spiritual 'crises' and loss of faith.

Heath has argued that Jacques is portrayed as 'a noble victim' and as 'a casualty of his background'.[23] Yet the narrator, although initially drawn to nihilism, comes to highlight his *mauvaise foi* and finally mocks the pursuit of nihilism as ideal.

The initial influence of such a philosophy is made clear. The nihilistic impulse nurtures the suicidal expression of a meaningless existence summed up by 'à quoi bon' (*MJFR*, p. 301). Valéry's *Monsieur Teste* represents human despair, the retreat into the self and the rejection of literature; his opposition to life – 'L'essentiel est contre la vie' – has a dramatic effect on the young reader.[24] The narrator identifies with the nihilists' position, transferring her confession from God to an embracing of *le néant*. Her concern is to reject the writers who had previously inspired her and who no longer seem relevant to her new disposition:

> La plupart des écrivains ressassaient 'notre inquiétude', et m'invitaient à un lucide désespoir. Je poussai à l'extrême ce nihilisme. Toute religion, toute morale, était une duperie, y compris le 'culte du moi'. [...] J'abandonnai Gide et Barrès (*MJFR*, p. 318).

Yet the narrator's real fear of death overrides her romantic vision of a nihilistic impulse towards death. Echoing the earnest 'jeune fille rangée', she describes how time-consuming activities fill the spiritual void: 'Et déjà la mort me rongeait. [...] Je recopiais des pages de Schopenhauer, de Barrès, des vers de Mme de Noailles. Je trouvais d'autant plus affreux de mourir que je ne voyais pas de raisons de vivre' (*MJFR*, pp. 319-20). The compulsion to copy slavishly the words of others suggests a departure from any idealized romantic view of her situation and eludes the reality she so craves. She is unable to anticipate suicide in its actuality – 'Pourtant, j'aimais la vie, passionnément' (*MJFR*, p. 320)[25] – and gradually the relationship

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[23] *Simone de Beauvoir*, op. cit., p. 70.

[24] *Monsieur Teste*, in *Œuvres*, II (Paris: Pléiade Gallimard, 1960), p. 73. Lejeune believed that Valéry himself represented 'une sorte de "défroqué" de l'autobiographie', in *L'Autobiographie en France* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1998), first published in 1971 (p. 60).

[25] As self-for-others, she can justify her life: 'Dès que je me sentais utile ou aimée, l'horizon s'éclairait et à nouveau je me faisais des promesses: 'Être aimée, être admirée, être nécessaire; être quelqu'un' (*MJFR*, p. 320).

between Jacques and Simone reveals that their experiences and the actuality of nihilism fall short of idealism; instead it disintegrates into a sordid and unsatisfactory conclusion. Triggered by the narrator's *prise de conscience*, Jacques's failings are shown to contrast with her desire to 'construire une pensée, une œuvre' (*MJFR*, p. 343). His lack of interest in the writing project offers proof to the narrator of the limitations of his standpoint, and presents the dilemma: 'Je voulais dire la vanité de tout; mais l'écrivain trahit son désespoir dès qu'il en fait un livre: mieux valait peut-être imiter le silence de M. Teste' (*MJFR*, p. 349). One could argue that the decision to study and to write comes to symbolize the narrator's rejection of Jacques's mode of thinking.

Indeed, Simone's entry into student life acts as a crucial turning point, reinforcing the realization that the disappointing reality of her life with Jacques does not coincide with the romantic ideals nurtured by the literature he gives her to read. It is a far cry from the reality of a sexual relationship too, a point which is made obvious in the contrasting references to Jacques's and Magda's relationship: '[...] notre histoire, faussée dès le départ, ne coïnciderait plus jamais avec celle que je nous avais inventée' (*MJFR*, p. 406). The narrator admits that the relationship has been more a figment of her imagination than a concrete reality (*MJFR*, p. 445). The realization that Jacques does not treat her as a woman – 'j'étais pour lui autre chose qu'une femme' (*MJFR*, p. 442) – contrasts starkly with her depiction of Magda as *femme fatale* with her 'visage aigu aux lèvres écarlates, de longues jambes soyeuses' (*MJFR*, p. 441). In contrast, her relationship with Jacques is characterized far more as an intellectual one. Furthermore, the narrator's idealization of the sexual act in descriptions of this relationship also suggests a reluctance to contemplate the reality of a physical relationship with him (*MJFR*, p. 404).

The re-examination of this relationship in hindsight is revealing. Referring to it as a 'fatalité', the narrator suggests that it is doomed to fail: '[...] je savais combien nous étions différents [...]. J'avais l'impression de subir une fatalité, plutôt que d'aller librement vers le bonheur' (*MJFR*, pp. 365-66). The predestined liability to disaster underlined by 'fatalité' opposes earlier references of the type, 'Jacques était mon destin' (*MJFR*, p. 294), and which hint at a more romantic future. References to their 'prédestination' (*MJFR*, p. 304)

and to imagined dialogues with Jacques in which Simone laments, 'je ne sais pourquoi ta vie est tragique' (*MJFR*, p. 336), further highlight the sense of a tragic playing out of the relationship. As the narrator compares his fate to her own self-development, her disappointment and self-delusion are made clear through the self-reflexive style of the memoirs: 'C'est que je venais de faire une cuisante découverte: cette belle histoire *qui était ma vie*, elle devenait fausse au fur et à mesure que *je me la racontais*' (*MJFR*, p. 442) (my emphasis). Thus the enlightened older narrator and the textual 'jeune fille rangée', who had romanticized the relationship with Jacques, are shown to be poles apart; and the former's avowed desire to free herself from Jacques's clutches is described as a spiritual struggle with demons from the past: 'En vérité, je me battais dans un tunnel, parmi des ombres. Contre le fantôme de Jacques, contre le passé défunt, je brandissais un idéal auquel je ne croyais plus' (*MJFR*, p. 445).[26]

Beauvoir's writing of the past not only reveals her rejection of self-definition via nihilism and its preponderance of male heroes. It also charts Jacques's demise in contrast with the narrator's success. A subsequent image of him is a far cry from the earlier Romantic portrait, as is made clear by the narrator's description of his transformation in less than flattering terms: '[...] le héros de notre jeunesse se métamorphoser en un bourgeois calculateur' (*MJFR*, p. 484). His downfall through alcoholism and financial ruin is recounted by a narrator who avenges her earlier naive idealization of him: 'Sans argent, sans travail, Jacques vécut quelque temps aux crochets de sa femme [...] fainéant, prodigue, coureur, ivrogne, menteur – et j'en passe [...]' (*MJFR*, p. 486). The description of Jacques in later life is of a man who has failed to act; he embodies death in life, so lacking is he in vitality: 'A quarante-cinq ans, il en paraissait plus de soixante. [...] il n'avait *plus de* regard, *plus de* sourire, *plus de* chair [...]' (*MJFR*, p. 486) (my emphasis); 'Il mourut à quarante-six ans de misère physiologique' (*MJFR*, p. 486).

Thus the disappointing reality of nihilism and the narrator's rejection of Jacques contrast with the world of education and the

[26] Garric, the leader of the 'Équipes sociales', once hero-worshipped by Simone, is also given similar treatment by the older narrator: '[...] ses propos me semblèrent stupides; et ces "talas" à qui tout mon passé me liait, comme je me sentais étrangère à eux!' (*MJFR*, pp. 457-58).

narrator's *chosen* life: 'En tout cas, je décidai que pour vivre, écrire et être heureuse, je pouvais parfaitement me passer de Jacques' (*MJFR*, p. 486). She will go on to describe a desire to be involved in the world, and the image of the writer and the student will replace the more abstract idealization of love *in death*. However, before the depiction of Sartre and existentialist perspectives are examined more closely, the young Simone's identification with Zaza, a female Other, needs to be considered. Their friendship reveals mirrorings of the Jacques-Simone relationship, but also offers new explorations of identity via the rather different positioning of Zaza and death in the *Mémoires*.

Many critics have identified Zaza's role in the *Mémoires* as symbolic. Her death has undeniably played an important role in critiques which trace the young narrator's apprehension of mortality. Labovitz drew attention to Zaza's role as 'an angel of death, a role Beauvoir had perhaps unconsciously assigned her', noting the focus on Zaza and not Sartre at the end of the memoirs.[27] Sheringham refers to Zaza as 'sacrificial victim' and 'partial *alter ego* who succumbs to the "destin fangeux" the intellectual will evade', and Heath, who has also viewed Zaza as alter ego, questions whether her death is necessary for the author to write:

> If Zaza is thought of as Beauvoir's alter ego [...] then the aggressiveness characteristic of the ambivalent relationship with an alter ego could well manifest itself as guilt, self-reproach. However, I prefer to read the guilt as a consequence of the textual strategy which 'used' Zaza's tragic end as a counterpart and condition of Beauvoir's success.[28]

An exploration of Beauvoir's representation of Zaza and her death should reveal why the obsessional hauntings of the Zaza figure play such a key role in the text and influence her motivations to write. Where Heath refers to Zaza's story as the sub-plot, using Brooks' definition as 'one means of warding off the danger of short-circuit, assuring that the main plot will continue through to the right end', I

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[27] *The Myth of the Heroine: the Female Bildungsroman in the 20th Century*, op. cit., p. 84.

[28] See *Autobiography: Devices and Desires*, op. cit., p. 224, and *Simone de Beauvoir*, op. cit., p. 72.

would draw attention to its greater role as *mirror* narrative, and one which is not subsumed by the central liberationist narrative.[29]

There are various reasons to suggest that Zaza, as alter ego, is the other 'jeune fille rangée'. Unlike Poupette, who is treated as Simone's plaything in the early years, Zaza inspires Simone with awe and takes on the role of a kind of surrogate older sister. Also, Zaza is forced to play the role of the bourgeois 'jeune fille du monde' (*MJFR*, p. 388) more than Simone herself.[30] The inclusion of Zaza's letters provides an additional insight into this other 'jeune fille rangée' since her mirror memoirs recounting problems in adolescence contrast with the narrator's story (*MJFR*, pp. 344-46) and her suicidal confessions could be seen to mirror Jacques's nihilism. The description of the period when Zaza is sent to Berlin (*MJFR*, pp. 488-93) not only reveals her isolation but also implicates Simone, whose replies are considered by Zaza to be symbolic lifesavers: 'La vôtre est venue *me rendre la vie…*' (*MJFR*, p. 490) (my emphasis). Likewise, the young Simone had also expressed her horror at the prospect of a life without Zaza in a way that suggests a symbiotic relationship between the two: '"Si elle ne devait plus jamais s'y asseoir, si elle mourait, que deviendrai-je?" Et de nouveau une évidence me foudroya: "Je ne peux plus vivre sans elle"' (*MJFR*, p. 131).

It is Zaza who will cause Simone to question her existence. Initially, her presence is described as a threat to Simone's identity. The latter characterizes her own stance as 'flou' and juxtaposes it with Zaza's robust sense of self:

> [...] au-dedans de moi, tout était flou, insignifiant; en Zaza j'entrevoyais une présence, jaillissante comme une source, robuste comme un bloc de marbre [...]. Je la comparais à mon *vide intérieur*, et je me méprisais.
> [...] Je n'apercevais *nulle trace de ma subjectivité* (*MJFR*, pp. 156-57) (my emphasis).[31]

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[29] *Simone de Beauvoir*, ibid., p. 73.

[30] 'Zaza était beaucoup plus solidement intégrée que moi à la bourgeoisie bien pensante [...]' (*MJFR*, p. 384).

[31] With Garric, Beauvoir also reduces herself to a state of non-existence: 'Garric parut; j'oubliai tout le reste et moi-même; l'autorité de sa voix me subjugua' (*MJFR*, p. 249).

Yet towards the end of the *Mémoires*, Zaza and Simone appear to have reversed roles, just as Simone had asserted herself in the wake of Jacques's decline.[32] 'Self' and 'other' do not co-exist happily: this is a problematic at the heart of existentialist thought which runs through Beauvoir's fictional and non-fictional œuvre. What is particularly striking in the depiction of Zaza and Simone is the fact that subject-other positionings are not fixed but consist of a more complex interchange. Where at the outset Simone's perceived absence of self ('mon vide intérieur') contrasts with the overwhelming presence of Zaza, Zaza subsequently becomes aligned with nothingness and death, as an extract from one of her letters reveals: '[...] je ne peux pas comme vous aller à la vie avec tout moi-même; au moment où j'existe avec le plus d'intensité, j'ai encore le goût du néant dans la bouche' (*MJFR*, p. 385). Zaza's role as 'alter ego' and eternal 'jeune fille rangée' points to a dual reading of the memoirs. This undermines the narrator's own chosen identification with the world of writers and intellectual pursuits, and complicates readings which posit a subject/other dialectic to describe their relationship. As mirror image of Simone, Zaza projects images of femininity, spirituality, and obedience to others, with the result that her death comes to represent the symbolic death of these particular traits.

Zaza's death overshadows Simone's new life as a student and dominates the book's conclusion. In the text she is presented as the martyr accepting her fate ('[...] la souffrance, j'y suis depuis longtemps habituée et je la trouve pour moi presque naturelle' (*MJFR*, p. 491)), and the narrator describes her death in terms of the idolized, spiritual image of the sacrificial woman:

> Quand je la revis, dans la chapelle de la clinique, elle était couchée au milieu d'un parterre de cierges et de *fleurs*. Elle portait une longue *chemise de nuit* en toile rêche. Ses cheveux avaient poussé, ils tombaient en mèches raides autour d'un visage jaune, et si *maigre*, que j'y retrouvai à peine ses traits (*MJFR*, p. 502) (my emphasis).

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[32] Moi argued that, 'Oscillating between radical absorption in Zaza or Sartre, and a sense of absolute emptiness, the young Beauvoir appears incapable of establishing a solid sense of identity', in *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*, op. cit., p. 226.

The narrator contrasts her own lack of faith with the devout stance of Zaza, whose family represents in her eyes the very worst aspects of adherence to religious codes and conventions. Her death is used as a means to attack the received ideas associated in the author's mind with the bourgeois Catholic Mabille family, and even to point the finger of blame in their direction. It is also portrayed as counter-image to the earthy, maternal depictions of women and death which are analysed in the context of myths of 'Woman' in *Le Deuxième sexe* as part of Beauvoir's thesis that woman has been positioned as Other.[33] Less the sexually devouring woman who inspires fear, the depiction of Zaza is closer to John Everett Millais' romanticized Ophelia, surrounded by flowers, or Delaroche's 'Le jeune martyre'.[34] These fragile-looking, beautiful young women are suggested by Zaza's long hair, her face which is 'maigre', and by the candles and flowers which surround her. The depiction of her death thus finds an echo in these conventional allegories of death as woman. However, such a comparison is not without its pitfalls, as Showalter has noted. She highlights the difficulties of using the image of Ophelia, arguing that 'there is no "true" Ophelia for whom feminist criticism must unambiguously speak, but perhaps only a Cubist Ophelia of multiple perspectives'.[35] Does Beauvoir romanticize and fictionalize Zaza's death in a manner similar to her male predecessors? Fear of both death and femininity combine in this positioning of Zaza as Other, and resonances of the Ophelia image reinforce the image of Zaza as archetypal 'jeune fille rangée' whose youthful beauty and female 'destin' are ossified in death.

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[33] In *Le Deuxième sexe*, images of death and female sexuality intermingle, thus contrasting with the virginal image of Zaza: 'Il aspire *au ciel* [...]; et sous ses pieds, il y a un gouffre moite, chaud, obscur tout prêt à le happer; [...] le héros qui se perd à jamais en retombant dans *les ténèbres maternelles*: caverne, abîme, enfer' (*DS*, I, p. 241) (my emphasis).

[34] These are images Bronfen uses in her book, *Over Her Dead Body*: *Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 213, p. 215. In 19th century representations of women and death by male artists, such as the Pre-raphealites, Ophelia was a recurring subject, to the point that such depictions became so commonplace as to be ignored (p. 3).

[35] 'Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism', in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. by P. Parker and G. Hartman (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 77-94 (p. 92).

Zaza's body is not only preserved in eternal youth; it is also desexualized. In doing so, the narrator distances herself from death and the woman as martyr since this representation erases any sense of a physical, situated self-in-action. Beauvoir as narrator appears to be caught between her identification of Simone with Zaza as alter ego, and her alienation from the romanticized representation of femininity of the Ophelia type which depicts frailty rather than strength. Thus her relinquishing of self-definition via the female Romantic heroine brings to light two important, related deaths in the *Mémoires*: the symbolic deaths of female sexuality in the text. Zaza's Ophelia-like death preserves her virginal innocence and femininity in an idealized image of 'Woman'; the 'jeune fille' will never become 'une jeune femme'. As symbolic parallel, descriptions of Simone focus on her intellectual 'becoming' in her initiation into adulthood, in a way which sounds the death knell of her younger self as 'jeune fille'. Yet, where Zaza serves as warning of the fate for women whose freedom is constrained, in contrast, the figure of Simone is shown to represent the successful life of the (gender non-specific) intellectual. Zaza's death in the *Mémoires* shrouds Beauvoir's narrative of enlightenment and independence and undermines the narrative of 'success' of the *agrégée* embarking on a new life: it is anticipated at the end of Part one, and Parts three and four both have the word 'mort' as their conclusion. As symbol, Zaza incarnates the divided feminine self, torn by loyalty to loved ones, and frustrated personal desires. The final image of Zaza presented to the reader is not that of the dead girl but of her haunting presence in the narrator's dreams; already she has become a figure of death who will recur in the volumes which follow.

It has been argued that the demise of both Jacques and Zaza as principal figures in the *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* influences the narrator's own chosen identification with the world of writers and intellectual pursuits, and her rejection of mystical or nihilistic conceptions of existence. In contrast, the account of Beauvoir's search for a female voice of 'becoming' encompasses her experiences through and beyond the influences of these actual deaths and their associated philosophies. Although many critics deny that a narrative tracing the emergence of a specifically female self exists (Huston, for example, commenting on Beauvoir's circumvention of 'the bodiliness

of their bodies'[36]), the narrator does highlight as turning point her *physical* transformation from 'jeune fille' to 'grande fille'.[37] This development is echoed in depictions of a number of female characters who are presented as role models and who have attracted less critical attention. They form part of an exploration of female identity and sexuality in which the latter and death are often conflated in their capacity to inspire fear and dread. The first of these characters is Clotilde, who, in Beauvoir's words, 'me proposait une attirante image de la jeune fille que je serais demain' (*MJFR*, p. 206). Yet Clotilde's fate proves disappointing, since her destiny is shown to lie in a bourgeois marriage: 'A peu de temps de là, elle fit, avec beaucoup de sentimentalité, un mariage "arrangé"' (*MJFR*, p. 207). The second is Stépha.

The presentation of Stépha as a sexually-aware individual who poses a threat to bourgeois norms contrasts with the narrator's horror of confronting the body ('[...] la sexualité m'effrayait' (*MJFR*, p. 226)). The fact that Stépha's revelations contradict Simone's own experiences highlights her confrontations with aspects of existence, such as death and desire, that cannot be 'rationalized' or controlled: '[…] Stépha contestait ma propre expérience' (*MJFR*, p. 391); '[...] Stépha m'avisait que ce monde policé avait des *coulisses*. Cette conversation m'inquiéta' (*MJFR*, p. 392) (my emphasis).[38] By embodying a sexualized image of womanhood in a manner which is neither Ophelia-like nor associated with the Mother, Stépha's situation contrasts with Simone's romanticized expectations of sexual initiation (*MJFR*, p. 404). If at this point the narrator identifies herself as desiring subject, she also implies that this is shameful: 'Il y a en moi je ne sais quel peut-être monstrueux désir, depuis toujours présent, de bruit, de lutte, de sauvagerie, et d'enlisement surtout [...]' (*MJFR*, p. 430). There is also, importantly, the potentially disruptive nature of

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[36] See 'Castor and Poulou: The Trials of Twinship', *L'Esprit créateur*, 29, 4 (Winter 1989), 8-31 (p. 18). Deguy has also commented on the absence of references to the body and sexuality in explorations of childhood in 'Simone de Beauvoir: la quête de l'enfance, le désir du récit, les intermittences du sens', *Revue des sciences humaines*, 222 (April-June 1991), 63-101 (p. 89).

[37] Keefe has observed that this volume has a 'great emphasis on her sexual development', *Simone de Beauvoir*: *A Study of Her Writings* (London: Harrap, 1983), p. 49.

[38] This is reinforced when the narrator admits that 'les choses de la chair restaient taboues pour moi' (*MJFR*, p. 403).

such desires as far as self-projection as intellectual is concerned, and this is also acknowledged by the narrator: '[...] j'étais une *âme*, un *pur esprit*, je ne m'intéressais qu'*à des esprits et à des âmes*; l'intrusion de la sexualité faisait éclater *cet angélisme*; elle me découvrait [...] le besoin et la violence' (*MJFR*, p. 406) (my emphasis). Here we see clearly the conflict between mind and body which traverses the text and which reveals the narrator's fear of losing control. The description of desires and instincts in terms of violence, struggle, brutality and entrapment is reminiscent of Sartre's allusions to female sexuality in his theorizations of the state of 'immanence' in *L'Être et le néant*, and offers a further example of the collapsing of Woman and death into a menacing 'unrepresentable' entity.[39] Moreover, such references also serve as reminder of the forceful mythologizing of women which the narrator has to negotiate.

The inclusion of fellow student Herbaud (René Maheu) in the narrative also enables the reader to glimpse traces of desire in the young Simone. Yet, although Herbaud empowers Beauvoir with an awareness of her concrete, physical presence – '[…] je me réjouissais qu'il me traitât – comme seule l'avait fait Stépha – en *créature terrestre*' (*MJFR*, p. 438) (my emphasis) – his view of her, refracted though the narrator's lens, veers towards traditional poles: he views Simone as a potential wife, a destiny far from the one the narrator imagines for herself.[40] In due course he is rejected in favour of intellectual exchanges with Sartre and the pursuit of an academic life which will fulfil the search for a meaningful existence.[41] Like Zaza and Jacques, then, the figures of Herbaud and Stépha gradually become overshadowed by a narrative promoting intellectual enlightenment over and above explorations of sexuality and desire. These are 'put to death' in the text. Instead, the narrator's words emphasize the necessity, in order to be taken seriously as an intellectual, to reject the codes and conventions of both her class and

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[39] In his text, immanence (as opposed to transcendence) is undesirable insofar as it reduces the individual to object status and passivity. For a far-reaching critique of Sartre's use of language in *L'Être et le néant* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), see Le Dœuff's second notebook in *L'Étude et le rouet: des femmes, de la philosophie, etc*. (Paris: Seuil, 1989).

[40] See also *MJFR*, p. 451.

[41] In this regard, Herbaud's intellectual inferiority is highlighted: '[...] je trouvais Sartre encore plus amusant qu'Herbaud' (*MJFR*, p. 472).

gender: 'Demain j'allais trahir ma classe et déjà *je reniais mon sexe*' (*MJFR*, p. 247) (my emphasis). Her refusal to accept marriage and childbearing ('la même ennuyeuse ritournelle'), identified as a specifically female fate, is contrasted with an espousal of the life of the (gender non-specific) intellectual: '[...] *le* savant, l'artiste, l'écrivain, le penseur créaient un autre monde, lumineux et joyeux, où tout avait sa raison d'être. [...] j'étais bien décidée à m'y tailler une place' (*MJFR*, p. 196) (my emphasis).[42] Driving the point home to her readers, the narrator reinforces the affirmation of her equal and non-confrontational status with her fellow male students: '[...] les hommes furent pour moi des camarades et non des adversaires' (*MJFR*, p. 412).

Furthermore, the positioning of Sartre in the text as mentor and father figure, and the fact that the narrator allows herself to be subsumed by Sartre's authority, would seem to make her more the 'jeune compagnon rang*é*' than the 'compagne', which permits femaleness:

> Je ne crois pas du tout que j'aie cherché en lui un succédané de mon père; je tenais à mon indépendance; j'exercerais un métier, j'écrirais, j'aurais une vie personnelle, je ne m'envisageai jamais comme la campagne d'un homme: nous serions *deux compagnons* (*MJFR*, p. 202) (my emphasis).[43]

The narrator emphasizes Sartre's intellectual superiority and protectiveness in terms similar to the description of the relationship with her father. Her struggle for recognition as a writer becomes subsumed by his ambitions: 'J'eus l'évidence qu'il écrirait un jour une œuvre philosophique qui compterait' (*MJFR*, p. 479); 'C'était la première fois de ma vie que je me sentais intellectuellement dominée par quelqu'un' (*MJFR*, p. 480). Thus she is 'Other' to Sartre, but still a gender non-specific other, and the famous phrase, 'On ne naît pas femme: on le devient' (*DS*, II, p. 13), is emphasized as an intellectual 'becoming' in the *Mémoires* as far as the representation of Beauvoir's

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[42] See also the narrator's distancing of herself from women preparing for marriage (*MJFR*, p. 242).

[43] This is made evident by the phrase which Beauvoir attributes to him: '"A partir de maintenant, je vous prends en main" me dit Sartre […]' (*MJFR*, p. 473). My focus on the father figure contrasts with studies which suggest that Sartre is the ultimate M/other figure. See, for example, Hughes 'Murdering the Mother', op. cit.

development is concerned. There is no indication of any sexual relationship, and the impact of gender on her development is downplayed. What underlies this identification with a male figure? A desire to erase femininity or difference, or a desire to enact an identification with a father-figure? In the narrator's words, Sartre corresponds exactly to the role model dreamed of by the young girl: 'Sartre répondait exactement au vœu de mes quinze ans: il était *le double* en qui je retrouvais, portées à l'incandescence, toutes mes manies' (*MJFR*, p. 482) (my emphasis).

In this context, education is pushed to the forefront in the success story which focuses on freedoms traditionally associated with men: 'Gagner de l'argent, sortir, recevoir, écrire, être libre: cette fois, vraiment, la vie s'ouvrait' (*MJFR*, p. 456). All too aware of the pervasiveness of conventional attitudes about the role of women, the narrator, in a bid to be taken seriously as an intellectual, chooses to downplay her gendered identity. At this point in the text the freedom which Beauvoir embraces as a student – '[...] il me semblait être déjà libre' (*MJFR*, p. 381) – still limits the possibility for self-definition as gendered intellectual. Clearly, the socio-historical context needs to be taken into account in this representation, and acknowledgement given to the huge obstacles that the author had to overcome in order to fulfil her academic potential.[44] If we consider the boundaries of Beauvoir's own ideological position, writing in the 1950s, her awareness of the difficulties for women writers to be taken seriously and to break out of the maternal role would have been a key concern. However, the reference to the fascinating Mlle Zanta also points to alternative role models, albeit briefly. She is described as a pioneer who reconciles her intellectual identity with a feminine sensibility:

> [...] elle vivait avec une jeune nièce qu'elle avait adoptée: ainsi avait-elle réussi à concilier sa vie cérébrale avec les exigences de sa sensibilité féminine. [...] Les femmes qui avaient alors une agrégation ou un doctorat de philosophie se comptaient sur les doigts de la main: je souhaitais être une de ces pionnières (*MJFR*, p. 222).

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[44] Moi explores in detail the educational structures and received ideas of the time which influence the particular trajectories of Beauvoir and Sartre, in *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*, op. cit. See also Le Dœuff's discussion of the depiction of the Sartre-Beauvoir relationship in *L'Étude et le rouet*, op. cit.

In short, writing through the lives and deaths of others brings the narratives of Jacques, Zaza and Sartre together. Beauvoir's decision to emphasize her intellectual persona presents one solution to the problems thrown up by confrontations with sexuality and mortality in autobiography, yet the descriptions of the deaths of others are ones which also offer a space of subjectivity, and which provide a point of contrast to the positioning as Other to Sartre. If, ultimately, the narrator describes her rejection of nihilism, religion and debauchery in favour of 'enlightenment' via the intellect, she also reveals the complexities of female identification and self-expression. The structuring of these multiple narratives in the context of the conventions of the autobiographical genre shall now be considered.

Autobiography and Intertext

There are a number of ways in which the text pushes at the boundaries of autobiography into neighbouring genres. Indeed, use of the term 'mémoire' in the title itself makes it difficult to draw clear distinctions between it and autobiography. As Hewitt reminds us, 'her personal history and her role as historical subject become inseparable'.[45] Labovitz argues for the work's potential as feminist *Bildungsroman* to be recognized insofar as 'we find in one positive image, sought by feminist critics, a twentieth-century female *Bildungsroman* depicting how self-development and self-realization, career, and education, can converge in a male/female relationship to complete the Bildung of the heroine'.[46] However, the narrator's desire to return to 'jeune fille rangée' status under the wing of Sartre would appear to complicate this type of reading, as does a consideration of the role of irony in the text. In addition, the *Bildungsroman* definition does not encompass all the themes in the book, especially those concerned with death, as Moi notes:

> […] *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* reads as a sustained effort to write the *Bildungsroman* of an independent woman; the story of the young Simone is explicitly intended to counter that of Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the*

[45] *Autobiographical Tightropes*, op. cit. p. 18.

[46] *The Myth of the Heroine: the Female Bildungsroman in the 20th Century*, op. cit., pp. 127-28, and also pp. 141-42. See also Sheringham, *French Autobiography: Devices and Desires*, op. cit., pp. 222-23.

> *Floss*, and yet, even here, the death-dealing Medusa rears her ugly head: it is not Simone's triumph at the *agrégation* or her meeting with Sartre that ends the book, but her account of the death of Zaza, who dies for love, at the hands of a selfish and petty-minded mother. [...] Simone's independence is paid for by Zaza's dependence and ultimate death; Simone's brilliant career is built on Zaza's dead body: *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* weaves its tale of success and happiness across the shadows of disappointment, dependence and death.[47]

The narrative tracing Beauvoir's intellectual development has much in common with the genre of the *Bildungsroman* but is just one of the multiple narrative threads running through the text. These threads will be explored here in the context of intertextuality and narrative voice, both stylistic features which readings focusing on the narrator's recreation of her life through an existentialist lens have tended to ignore.

By including references and allusions to her literary predecessors, the narrator opens up the notion of *auto*biography as an authentic expression of the self, but also suggests *thanato*graphical preoccupations. Her desire to 'tell all', like Rousseau, places her within the canon of French autobiography: '"Une œuvre, décidai-je, où je dirais tout, *tout*"' (*MJFR*, p. 335).[48] Certainly, the size of her autobiographical œuvre bears witness to a desire to follow in Rousseau's footsteps by making a claim for sincerity and honesty. Memories of accusation and recrimination in the *Mémoires* are reminiscent of scenes from Rousseau's *Confessions* and Stendhal's *Vie de Henry Brulard*.[49] Like Rousseau's text, the confessions

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[47] *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*, op. cit., p. 218.

[48] Tidd's reading of the project of 'telling all' highlights the importance of viewing autobiography as 'a highly politicized form of writing, at the intersection of competing notions of truth, authority, identity, subjecthood and literature' (p. 12). She rightly rejects a simplistic interpretation of 'telling all' (p. 12), and highlights the impossibility of this task, in 'Telling the Truth in Simone de Beauvoir's Autobiography', *New Readings*, II (Cardiff: School of European Studies, 1996), 7-19.

[49] When Simone's aunt accuses her of committing a minor misdemeanour, for example, the scene is reminiscent of Rousseau's outrage at being falsely accused of breaking a comb and his emphasis on the event as a defining moment of his childhood (*MJFR*, p. 18). In Book one of the *Confessions* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1968), he recounts the memory and gives it the status of key turning point in the narration of the life (pp. 56-57). In addition, 'Tante Alice' becomes 'une vilaine fée' in a

represent not only a desire to elicit the reader's sympathy; they also offer an alternative mode of self-expression for the narrator, couched as they often are in a more romanticized or melodramatic language.[50] Thus Rousseau's retreat to the idyllic 'Les Charmettes' and Stendhal's trip to 'Les Échelles' function as literary models, finding their parallel in Beauvoir's lyrical descriptions of escapes to Meyrignac.[51] Beauvoir's engagement with canonical texts firmly places the *Mémoires* within the confines of a largely male-dominated genre. In stark contrast with the early religious confessional, religion is subsumed here by literature. The confession to God becomes a confession to the reality of mortality and death; indeed, it could be viewed as the story of Simone's anti-conversion in contrast with the disastrous consequences of Zaza's martyrdom.

Literature, in general, forms an important part of the narrator's intellectual coming of age, to the extent that the illicit reading of books censored by her parents comes to symbolize the end of Simone's childhood:

> A Paris, feignant de me restreindre aux *Nuits* de Musset, je m'installai devant le gros volume contenant ses œuvres complètes [...]. Je passais des heures merveilleuses [...] à dévorer la collection de romans à 90 centimes qui avaient enchanté la jeunesse de papa: Bourget, Alphonse Daudet, Marcel Prévost, Maupassant, les Goncourt. Ils complétèrent mon éducation sexuelle [...] (*MJFR*, p. 152).

Even her 'éducation sexuelle' is largely completed vicariously by her reading of male authors: 'Grâce à eux, je m'affranchissais de mon enfance [...]' (*MJFR*, p. 153). In addition, a reference to 'rêves d'adolescents inquiets' (*MJFR*, p. 352) echoes Mauriac's

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mythologized scene which echoes Stendhal's depiction of his aunt ('mon mauvais génie pendant toute mon enfance [...]') and his wrongdoings in *La Vie de Henry Brulard* (Paris: Divan, 1927), first published 1890.

[50] We could compare Beauvoir's words (*MJFR*, pp. 18-19) with those of Rousseau: 'J'en emportai les longs souvenirs du crime et l'insupportable poids des remords dont au bout de quarante ans ma conscience est encore chargée [...]. Qui croirait que la faute d'un enfant pût avoir des suites aussi cruelles?', *Confessions*, op. cit., p. 120.

[51] *Confessions*, op. cit., and *La Vie de Henry Brulard*, op. cit.

autobiographical poem, *L'Adieu à l'adolescence*, which is also mentioned in the text (*MJFR*, p. 303).[52]

However, the attention devoted to Marcelle Tinayre's less well-known popular novel *Hellé* is even more revealing. In this female-authored text there are clear parallels with *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*.[53] Hellé de Riveyrac, the heroine, is raised and educated by her uncle Sylvain, who proclaims that, '[E]lle a le cerveau d'un homme et le cœur d'une vierge'.[54] This bears a marked similarity to the young Simone's father's words, 'Papa disait volontiers: "Simone a un cerveau d'homme, Simone est un homme"' (*MJFR*, p. 169), and highlights the way in which the narrator's sense of self is shaped by the perceptions of others. The narrator internalizes this identification when she comments: 'Je me flattais d'unir en moi "un cœur de femme, un cerveau d'homme". Je me retrouvai l'Unique' (*MJFR*, p. 413). Replacing the sexually-specific 'vierge' with more general 'femme' in her reference, suggesting either 'woman' or 'wife', also draws attention away from a sexualized portrait of her younger self.

Hellé falls in love with the bourgeois Maurice Clairmont, a poet concerned with appearances and conventions, and not dissimilar to Jacques in the *Mémoires*. Realizing that she is in love with the intellectual and political activist, Antoine Genesvrier, a character mirrored perhaps by Sartre, Hellé's desire for reciprocity in love strongly mirrors the narrator's ideal (as enunciated in *Le Deuxième sexe* and the *Mémoires*): 'Je ne veux ni me sacrifier, ni sacrifier mon mari. Nous devons nous efforcer de réaliser ensemble une vie harmonieuse en nous respectant [...]'.[55] The parallels between these texts reinforce the element of romantic parody in the *Mémoires* and the ambivalent position adopted by the narrator towards her physical

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[52] *L'Adieu à l'adolescence* (Paris: Stock, 1911).

[53] *Hellé* (Paris: Nelson, 1899). For an introduction to Tinayre's writing, see Holmes, *French Women's Writing, 1848-1994* (London: Athlone Press, 1996). She argues that the fiction of women writers of this generation, now often out of print, 'demonstrates how the popular novel has served as the site for women's reflection on the changing conditions of their lives, and for the negotiation of the meanings of femininity' (p. 62).

[54] *Hellé*, ibid., p. 50.

[55] Ibid., p. 230.

self. Through the voice of another woman writer, gendered concerns are voiced. Moreover, this identification with Tinayre sets up an alternative literary genealogy with female predecessors which lifts the female self out of the position of objectified or idealized Other into one in which the woman writer is a subject in her own right.[56]

What is the function of such literary intertexts? The references are not part of the same 'listing principle' or enumeration drive of the later volumes of autobiography in which we find exhaustive lists of books read and films seen. They are used as points of linkage between autobiographies of the present and the past, moving between and beyond what is, even if subverted, a male-defined canon. I would argue that reading *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* as autothanatography highlights the author's search for a *voice-over*, on, and through death, and as such, the canonical figures of the past serve as springboards for her own autobiography.[57] These resuscitated *voix d'outre tombe* authenticate Beauvoir's text by positioning it within a clearly defined and recognized field and by placing the author in a lineage which includes R, Stendhal, and Chateaubriand.

Reading the autobiographies of other writers serves as practice ground for Beauvoir to review her own writing methods. In her text, the rhetorical use of *le passé* and *le passé littéraire* begins to open up a narrative space between nostalgia and cynicism. Beauvoir's search for her own voice includes parody of precursors and ironic self-comment on her previous naiveties. In this regard, in the space between the older narrator and the young child character, Hewitt has identified 'ironic, literary, feminine workings of a text that weaves and unravels its own necessary constructions' and she refers to Beauvoir's 'undoing of her own masculine vision'.[58] The role of this older, ironic narrator could also be considered, I would argue, in terms of a superego or 'judge'. The latter analyses the younger versions of her autobiographical self, now viewed with and informed by hindsight and

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[56] Beauvoir had also identified with strong female characters such as Eliot's Maggie Tulliver and Alcott's Joe (*MJFR*, pp. 194-95). However, it is not only the characters, but the figure of the woman writer with whom she identifies. Her refusal to follow Maggie's fate combines with her idealization of the autonomous woman writer.

[57] I am grateful to Professor Mary Orr for suggesting this term, which I am using to emphasize the notion of a disembodied narrative voice.

[58] *Autobiographical Tightropes*, op. cit., pp. 16-17.

overlaid with an existentialist framework. This is evident in the portrayal of the child character as a self-to-the-future: the repeated use of the future tense, for example, anticipates her successful liberation and independence, beginning with her new life at the 'cours Désir': '[...] désormais, j'*aurais* mon cartable, mes livres, mes cahiers, mes tâches; ma semaine et mes journées se *découperaient* selon mes propres horaires; j'entrevoyais un avenir qui, au lieu de me séparer de moi-même, se *déposerait* dans ma mémoire […]' (*MJFR*, p. 32) (my emphasis).

The narrator's success is contrasted with others' failure, as demonstrated in the Jacques and Zaza narratives,[59] and it could be argued that an 'orgueil de pouvoir être' predicts a successful outcome to the author's quest for self-identity.[60] It anticipates the narrative of educational success, contesting the narratives of death by projecting the narrator's future destiny as *writer* constructing a self and a past: '[...] adulte, je *reprendrais* en main mon enfance et j'en *ferais* un chef-d'œuvre sans faille. Je me rêvais l'absolu fondement de moi-même et ma propre *apothéose*' (*MJFR*, p. 79) (my emphasis).[61] Yet the presentation of academic success is also undermined by the older narrator in derisory comments about the misapprehensions of her younger self. Revelations of *mauvaise foi* appear; a question mark also remains over the non-sexualizing of the female voice within the narrative charting the narrator's liberation from her family and educational success. In these narratives the older narrator 'judges' her success against existentialist benchmarks, yet also suggests that these cannot be taken at face value.

Indeed, complexities in narrative voice are not restricted to the space opened up by the split between the older narrator and the young child character. The role of Zaza as structuring device can be examined in terms of genre to highlight the narrator's explorations of a female autothanatographical voice. Zaza as 'shadow' voice provides the author with material for writing, and a motivation to write. The

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[59] Hewitt has observed that 'the young character's desires and goals are oriented by a system of necessity and of justification, and the narrative adheres to the same system, emphasizing its own progression', ibid., p. 31.

[60] The phrase is used by Jeanson in *Simone de Beauvoir ou l'entreprise de vivre* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), p. 50.

[61] See also *MJFR*, pp. 197-98, p. 234, for her projections as writer.

narrator reasserts her own identity in the shadow of Zaza's death, constantly realigning her differing positions of *femme* versus *compagnon*, or of writerly self in the present versus remembered past selves. The depiction of Zaza's death, explored earlier, could be seen to be overtaken by the muse-like figure of Zaza as *revenant* who is resuscitated in the subsequent volumes, *La Force de l'âge* and *La Force des choses*. Her presence in the text is inextricably linked to the autobiographical project itself and becomes an important structural feature of it. To cite just a few examples of these recurring images, in *La Force de l'âge* the horrors of Zaza's death become intertwined with the difficulties of writing itself, as revealed in comments made about the writing of *Quand prime le spirituel*, Beauvoir's early fictional work: 'Je tentai à nouveau de *ressusciter* Zaza [...]. J'échouai néanmoins à rendre son histoire *convaincante* (*FA*, p. 257) (my emphasis). Likewise, in *La Force des choses*, the figure of Zaza recurs when the narrator describes how the process of rereading notebooks and letters brings events back to life, to the extent that she relives Zaza's death, 'comme si elle était morte une seconde fois' (*FC*, II, p. 249). This rereading and rewriting presents a readjustment in perspective: now Zaza no longer haunts the narrator's dreams – 'Plus jamais elle ne revint me voir en rêve' (*FC*, II, p. 249) – but becomes a symbol of the narrator's detachment from her own childhood: '[...] depuis qu'elle a été publiée et lue, l'histoire de mon enfance s'est entièrement détachée de moi' (*FC*, II, p. 249). It is in this volume that the narrator broaches the effects of ageing on her female self and makes more explicit references to the impact of gender on her situation. Does this acceptance of her own gendered self release the fearful image of death, beauty and the feminine which had been locked into the figure of Zaza?

Zaza's role as catalyst of the autobiographical project appears here to be of fundamental importance, as numerous critics have noted. Mackeefe refers to her death as source of inspiration and suggests that writing is 'prompted by the urge to exorcize the ghost of Zaza's death, and by her failure to alter Zaza's life […]', and Marks identifies the debt to Zaza as a goal of writing, and the writing of Zaza's death as a liberation:

> Because of this death the narrator is free. Because of this death the narrator writes. Zaza, too, finally is immolated so that her loving friend may prosper.

> The horror of death is replaced by a moral debt which in itself is a *raison d'être*. To write in order to redeem Zaza means that Zaza is not dead. Zaza lives.[62]

Hewitt also draws attention to the reparative function of Zaza's death, emphasizing the idea of 'juridical exoneration from guilt' through confession, although this is not a uniform view amongst critics.[63] She identifies the problem of the debt which is non-repayable – perhaps one reason why this is not the first or last time Zaza's death will be recounted. Guilt fuels the author's desire to absolve herself of blame, hence the words: '[…] j'ai pensé longtemps que *j'avais payé ma liberté de sa mort*' (*MJFR*, p. 503) (my emphasis). There seems to be a tacit recognition by the author that if she had not had this experience, her own desire to write might have been radically altered. In *Tout compte fait*, the narrator acknowledges that the presence of Zaza at the 'cours Désir' was 'le premier hasard important' (*TCF*, p. 20) in her life and even asks the question: 'Sans elle, ma vie adulte aurait-elle été différente?' (*TCF*, p. 21). Zaza's death is even more vehemently blamed on the bourgeoisie in the discussion in this volume, a criticism which reaffirms the author's determination to detach herself from this milieu: 'L'assassinat de Zaza par son milieu a été pour moi une expérience bouleversante et inoubliable' (*TCF*, p. 22).[64] The death politicizes the author to the extent that it makes her aware of the stifling effects of Zaza's upbringing. This unforgettable experience, couched in dramatic language, stretches beyond the actual death of a childhood friend, opening up questions of selfhood, gender and the motivation to write. As mirror 'jeune fille rangée', Beauvoir

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[62] See Mackeefe, 'Zaza Mabille: Mission and Motive in Simone de Beauvoir's *Mémoires*', *Contemporary Literature*, 24, 2 (1983), 204-21 (pp. 220-21), and Marks, *Encounters with Death*, op. cit., pp. 54-55. See also p. 47.

[63] *Autobiographical Tightropes*, op. cit., p. 38. Hewitt also draws attention to the intertextual parallels between Beauvoir and Montaigne, who wrote his *Essais* as a tribute to his dead friend, La Boëtie (p. 35). Hughes contests 'reparative' readings of the text, arguing instead that 'the "maternal" interpretation [...] makes it impossible to read the end of the *Mémoires* as exclusively loving or reparative, or even simply as the acknowledgement of a moral debt', in 'Murdering the Mother: Simone de Beauvoir's *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*', op. cit., p. 181.

[64] Whitmarsh drew attention to the fact that Beauvoir saw Zaza's death 'symbolically as an assassination for it epitomized the crushing effect of the bourgeois family upon a young girl', in *Simone de Beauvoir and the Limits of Commitment* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981), p. 7.

tries to speak for the dead other, as alter ego, while also transforming her death into an ongoing narrative.

Furthermore, the writing of Zaza's death could also be viewed as an attempt to respond in writing to Zaza's look of reproach, an image which closes the volume (*MJFR*, p. 503). Her short life is converted into symbol, echo and fiction in Beauvoir's œuvre. Guilt, nostalgia and remorse fuel the drive to construct the past in words, in contrast with the anticipation of an existentialist future. As freeing mechanism, but compelling subject, this paradoxical influence results in the recreation of Zaza's image: via a female Other, a glimpse of a feminine self is unveiled. Had Zaza been merely an obstacle to be removed through writing, and to be replaced by Sartre in a narrative emphasizing development and progress, her reappearance as symbolic figure would have no explanation. In this respect Bronfen has drawn attention to the linkage of women and death in Western representations:

> She is constructed as the place of mystery, of not knowing, Freud's 'dark continent', as the site of silence but also of the horrifying void that 'castrates' the living man's sense of wholeness and stability. [...] a dream, a phantom, a mediatrix, a muse. Woman and death are considered to be the two 'unrepresentable' things and yet they are ubiquitously present 'allegorically' in western representations as precisely such a limit and excess. [...] The conjunction of femininity and death is not just to be located on the thematic but also on the structural, rhetorical level of a text.[65]

This perspective sheds light on the connections between death and the feminine in Beauvoir's project. The expression of self via death in the *Mémoires* offers an alternative scenario to the presentation of the life as successful existentialist project. Zaza as subject shapes the original project in which the narrator turns to writing as substitute for a loss of life. She not only represents the Ophelia-like Romantic heroine and all that the narrator is *not*; she also offers the writer the possibility of exploring aspects of herself via Zaza as mirror self. Zaza is both Muse and mirror, remembered friend and resuscitated fiction, and the narrator speaks for the dead Other as alter ego.

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[65] *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*, op. cit., p. 205.

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Beauvoir's choice of the genre of *mémoires* underlines the text's function as commemorative act, since a space is created for Zaza's memoir, as the memory of the Other. This vocalizing of the female *mémoire* contrasts with male models of the genre. Furthermore, the aligning of herself both within and outwith the male tradition could be understood here in a socio-historical context: Simone de Beauvoir wanted to be taken seriously as a writer at a time when women writers were bracketed off as a separate category.

The fictionalized sections and stylized projection of the narrative of success onto narratives of death within scenes depicting childhood and adolescence reveal the roots of the narrator's obsession with mortality and contest traditional definitions of childhood. In addition, the cyclical structures of self-representation undermine definitions of autobiography as a linear, chronological *récit*: the interchanging past, present and future narrators are juxtaposed with the deaths of others, and the voices and images of others, via letters and dialogue. The narrator is setting herself against those who die, and against philosophies of death; it could be argued that she even writes the death of her own gendered and embodied self. We can trace the story of the narrator's successful bid for freedom from a stifling bourgeois background into the world of writing and academe but this is not the sum total of the *Mémoires*. The text can also be read as a sustained exploration of the self, death, and representations of death, via a broad spectrum of philosophies and ideologies. The use of intertextual *voix d'outre tombe* serves an important function as these voices are shown to contribute to the narrator's *bildung* and to offer alternative modes of identification and experimentation within the autobiographical genre, thus contributing to the text's innovative status.

Neither exclusively *Bildungsroman* nor memoir, the narrator's presentation of her self-development and her explorations of society are overshadowed by the overwhelming negatives of the Jacques and Zaza narratives which dominate the final pages. By reshaping Chateaubriand, whose acute awareness of mortality invaded his earliest memories, and by reading and writing through the lens of other literary deaths, Beauvoir finds her own voice via the older

narrator as 'judge'.[66] She thus complicates the narrative intentions of the *Mémoires*. While this authorial *voice-over* takes the ideological position of ungendered, disembodied speaker, with its concomitant ambiguity, the seeds of a specifically female voice, via Zaza as *female voice-over*, are sown. Thus the *voice-overs* of literary forebears, and of Zaza as shadow Other, offer alternative ways in which to read the text from an autothanatographical perspective.

The problem of the body – the way in which it is inscribed or erased in depictions of the self in the autobiographical text – is far from resolved, and it will be a locus to which the author will repeatedly return. Indeed, the structures of death in *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* reveal the narrator's apprehensions of mortality and highlight her negotiations of a gendered identity. It is primarily the Zaza narrative which unveils her own conflicting and ambivalent attitude towards herself as a woman, confirmed in the manner in which she mirrors or opposes her female 'others'. These narratives reflect some of the most poignant conflicts that she finds within herself, and which can only be expressed via death. As subject, Zaza allows Beauvoir to express herself autothanatographically, at the very least by putting to death and putting into death *(les) jeunes filles rangées*. Thus we have seen that in the *Mémoires* autobiography becomes autothanatography when Beauvoir writes via the lives and deaths of 'significant others'. In chapter two, the intersections of autobiography and autothanatography in *La Force de l'âge* will be examined more closely: these reveal expressions of the narrator's 'fracturing' selves within a 'fracturing' genre.

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[66] Cf *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, first published in 1848.

CHAPTER II

La Force de l'âge

The second volume of Beauvoir's autobiographical *œuvre* follows a much stricter chronology than the *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*. It encompasses the narrator's bid for freedom in 1929 from the confines of the family to her situation at the end of the Second World War. Experiences of wartime and the beginnings of a life with Sartre are presented alongside the narrator's detailed descriptions of her first attempts at writing novels.[1] Furthermore, in *La Force de l'âge* a 'cri de révolte',[2] her explicit rejection of bourgeois privilege – which had been foregrounded in the memoirs –, combines with a desire to embrace existentialist philosophy as the narrator avows that she has become more politically and philosophically aware.[3]

The impact of separation and displacement (necessitated by the taking up of a teaching post in the South of France for Beauvoir, Le Havre for Sartre, and then followed by the Occupation) opens the narrative up to broader political and geographical contexts. In this respect, and as far as reception of the volume is concerned, critics have focused on the author's depiction of nature and travel and identify the thirst for knowledge and experiences that will dominate this and subsequent volumes.[4] However, it is undoubtedly the narrator's experience of war that has elicited the greatest critical

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[1] Hewitt notes the narrator's acknowledgement that '[…] her reliance on Sartre fits into a chain – God, her father, Zaza, Sartre – thereby connecting her bourgeois childhood to her adult life', in *Autobiographical Tightropes* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), p. 39.

[2] The phrase is used by Lasocki in *Simone de Beauvoir ou l'entreprise d'écrire* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1971), p. 8.

[3] See Winegarten for an account of the political situation in France at the time, in *Simone de Beauvoir: A Critical View* (Oxford: Berg, 1988). Moubachir, *Simone de Beauvoir ou le souci de différence* (Paris: Seghers, 1972) and Jaccard, *Simone de Beauvoir* (Zurich: Juris-Verlag, 1968) explore the philosophical arguments put forward in the work; Hourdin, *Simone de Beauvoir et la liberté* (Paris: Ed. du Cerf, 1962) and Henry, *Simone de Beauvoir ou l'échec d'une chrétienté* (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1961) explore the treatment of religion in the work

[4] Cayron cites *La Force de l'âge* fairly extensively in her study of the theme of nature in *La Nature chez Simone de Beauvoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973). See also Jeanson's analysis in his chapter entitled, 'Autobiographisme, narcissisme et images de soi', in *Simone de Beauvoir ou l'entreprise de vivre* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), pp. 195-206.

attention. The 1990s saw a number of highly controversial publications which questioned the nature of Sartre and Beauvoir's political commitment during the Occupation.[5] In particular, critics have analysed *La Force de l'âge* in conjunction with the posthumous *Lettres à Sartre* and *Journal de guerre* in order to pinpoint contradictions or ambiguities in their stance. Issues which have come under particular scrutiny include Beauvoir's (reluctant) co-operation, in line with colleagues at the *Lycée Camille See* and elsewhere, in the signing of papers which declared that she was not a freemason or a Jew (*FA*, p. 532), and her employment with a national radio station.[6] To these comments could be added the fact that in *La Force de l'âge* the narrator makes explicit her condemnation of the Vichy regime, admitting that her early idealism and naivety would later become a source of shame.

Although I will not be focusing specifically on issues of Beauvoir and Sartre's joint political engagement, I will examine Beauvoir's changing constructions of identity in the light of the Occupation in Paris and the deaths of others. The analysis in this chapter traces the thanatographical underpinnings of the text by examining past, present and future constructions of the self. Where the *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* had on first impressions been the rewriting of a successful existentialist bid for freedom of the narrator, in fact the death of Zaza and the downfall of Jacques provided counterpoints of *thanatos* against the triumphant ending of the narrator setting out into the world. Similarly in *La Force de l'âge* the optimistic embracing of *engagement*, the liberation of Paris, and the narrator's transition from idealism to solidarity are all tempered by her encounters with death. The shock of the deaths of others within the wartime experience brings about the forced contemplation of her own death and the ageing process. Discussions of *La Force de l'age* will highlight the dual narrative perspective which presents an older and wiser narrator acting as both historian and judge of her younger self during the period of the Occupation.

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[5] For example, Joseph's *Une si douce occupation: Simone de Beauvoir et Jean Paul Sartre, 1940-1944* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1991).

[6] Having got herself a job as features producer on a national radio network, she followed, she claims, the unwritten code of her fellow intellectuals that, 'on pouvait travailler dans la presse de la zone libre et à Radio-Vichy: tout dépendait du sens des articles et des émissions' (*FA*, p. 588).

The first section of this chapter begins by examining Beauvoir's self-representation, especially the relationship between public and private selves and textual worlds, in order to explore further the oppositional approaches of earlier critiques discussed in the introduction. This analysis highlights the blurring of boundaries between the two spheres and the impact that this has on the narrator's representations of self and other, including the problematic 'pactes' between her and Sartre. The second section then considers the portrayal of a 'writing self'. To what extent does Beauvoir employ an 'existentializing' of self against death via the persona of the writer? In particular, the role of the female writer as existentialist self in the public sphere will be examined. In addition, private encounters with death, and negotiations of death as represented by the state of *immanence*, a term which denotes in existentialist philosophy an undesirable mode of existence, often associated with death, repetition and passivity, and positioned in opposition to transcendence, will be analysed.[7]

Explorations of an 'existentializing' of self then feed into the problems of reading *La Force de l'âge* as existentialist autobiography. Questions of genre form the basis of the final section of this chapter, more specifically, the extent to which the diversity of genre and narrative voice in *La Force de l'âge* undermines the notion of autobiography. In particular, I examine why the author chose to incorporate travelogue, *journal intime* and *critique* into her text.[8] In the process, the relationship between the different genres and the effects of the interplay of public/private spheres on the representation of a female self are explored in order to ascertain to what extent the

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[7] In *Le Deuxième sexe*, Beauvoir described how women have been aligned with the state of immanence: '[...] précisément les hommes ont toujours regardé la femme comme l'immanence du donné; si elle produit récoltes et enfants ce n'est pas par un acte de sa volonté; elle n'est pas sujet, transcendance, puissance créatrice, mais un objet chargé de fluides' (*DS, I,* p. 265).

[8] For discussion of Beauvoir's use of the *journal intime*, see Poisson, *Sartre et Beauvoir: du* je *au* nous (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002); Keefe, 'Autobiography and Biography: Simone de Beauvoir's Memoirs, Diary and Letters', in *Autobiography and the Existential Self*, ed. by Keefe and Smyth (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1995), pp. 61-81; Wilson, 'Daughters and Desire: Simone de Beauvoir's *Journal de Guerre*', in *Autobiography and the Existential Self*, ed. by Keefe and Smyth (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1994), pp. 83-98.

position of the existentialist woman autobiographer is different from that of her male counterparts.

It will be argued that an auto*thanato*graphical drive underpins Beauvoir's writing, yet is written over continuously by 'existentializing' strategies: these include attempts to shape meaningful events onto a framework based upon existentialist theories that promote the fulfilment of freely-chosen projects and the establishment of a position as universal speaking subject. Past, present, and future constructions of self within *La Force de l'âge* as auto*bio*graphy will be explored. This will be followed by analysis of the ways in which the text as auto*thanato*graphy problematizes such constructions of self. The notions of the self in writing, the writing self, and the act of writing up the self common to autobiography and autothanatography will then reveal their differences.

The Self in Public/Private Worlds

Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée depicted the transition from the family sphere to an extended 'family', concluding at the point when the narrator embarked on her studies and asserted her independence as a student. In *La Force de l'âge*, which covers the period 1929-45, the narrator adjusts her changing conception of freedom in the light of external and personal events, notably the Second World War. Her concerns with the changing political situation in France mirror personal crises, particularly concerning her relationship with Sartre, and there are notable differences to be gleaned in her portrayal of the self in public and private spheres.

The articulation of a sense of optimism and freedom by the 'jeune fille rangée' is underlined at the beginning of *La Force de l'âge* by repetition of the same word which had closed *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*: 'liberté'. The prospect of creating a life from the opportunities which lie ahead fuels the representation of a public *pour-soi* existentialist identity as one that is rooted in the world, and looking towards the future. This key term in existentialist philosophy is being used here to emphasize the ways in which existentialist precepts form the backbone of the representation of identity as a

perpetual forging of a self-to-the-future in the work.[9] The aim of the narrator is to reject her bourgeois background in an attempt to rid herself of the *mauvaise foi* of her earlier bourgeois stance. She has broken off with most of her old friends, effectively writing off her past: 'J'avais perdu presque tous les miens. Zaza était morte, Jacques marié, Lisa partie [...]' (FA, p. 38); 'Ainsi ne gardais-je que très peu de liens avec mon passé. En revanche, je me familiarisai avec les camarades de Sartre' (*FA*, p. 39). Having dropped tiresome duties ('presque toutes les obligations qui m'ennuyaient' (*FA*, p. 65)), the few references to her mother and father denote a break from the family sphere. In addition, the prospect of no more family holidays reflects a desire on the part of the narrator to lead an authentic 'vraie vie' by anchoring herself in the world.[10] The text is imbued with the optimism of the 'pre-war' idealistic self, the use of the phrase 'pour la première fois' highlighting again the author's reminder that, like Sartre's Poulou in *Les Mots*, she is representing a younger, naive self.

At the forefont is a desire to 'delegitimize by proxy' her conventional bourgeois background by writing herself as *engagée*. The process of abandoning one's status by a strategy of 'delegitimation' has been studied by Maclean, who argues that it represents 'the way of the mother', which 'involves a conscious exploitation of difference and multiplicity' as opposed to

[9] Hughes explains the 'pour-soi' positioning as follows: 'Consciousness is consciousness of something; it cannot exist without objects. It is what perceives – and is differentiated from – objects, things, the immutability and chaos of the world (the *en-soi*/'in-itself'). Unlike the in-itself, consciousness, while it has a tendency towards inertia, is moreover able to change, evolve and to question itself. […] Consciousness – the characteristic experience of which is choice/metamorphosis – is what allows human beings to recreate and transcend themselves perpetually', in Alex Hughes, *Simone de Beauvoir,* Le Sang des autres (Glasgow: University of Glasgow French and German Publications, 1995), p. 62. Beauvoir uses the terms 'transcendence' and 'immanence' to refer to specifically male/female categories in *Le Deuxième Sexe*: 'Or, ce qui définit d'une manière singulière la situation de la femme, c'est que, étant comme tout être humain, une liberté autonome, elle se découvre et se choisit dans un monde où les hommes lui imposent de s'assumer comme l'Autre: on prétend la figer en objet, et la vouer à l'immanence puisque sa transcendance sera perpétuellement transcendée par une autre conscience essentielle et souveraine' (*DS*, I, p. 31).

[10] See, for example: 'C'était donc arrivé: je passais mes vacances loin de Meyrignac! Comme j'avais redouté autrefois cet exil! Mais ce n'en était pas un; au contraire, je me trouvais solidement ancrée, enfin, au cœur de ma vraie vie' (*FA*, p. 56).

'relegitimation' as a mastering of patriarchal power.[11] In the case of Beauvoir, it is perhaps more useful to think of her delegitimation strategy as not being specifically tied to Mother/Father binaries but rather, as a desire to reject a social class, and thus rooted more in socio-historical terms than psychoanalytical ones. Beauvoir is not strictly speaking rejecting the patriarchal line, merely rejecting the bourgeois ethic for an existentialist, and possibly, an equally patriarchal one. Nevertheless, Maclean's analysis of the subversive potential of the 'delegitimation' strategy opens up new possibilities for autothanatography, as she suggests: 'One of the advantages of the autographic and autothanatographic narratives of illegitimacy and delegitimation is that they offer an entry into a polymorphous and excentric experience which shapes both life and fiction'.[12]

Such attempts by Beauvoir to disenfranchize herself from the bourgeoisie and to eschew a bourgeois past are not always convincing. The narrator describes the ways in which she and Sartre distance themselves from the bourgeoisie by inventing 'roles' and playing out inauthentic identities as a mocking gesture. The theatricality of these episodes is emphasized, serving to highlight even further the irony of the gestures, which come back full circle to their bourgeois games of the pre-war period.[13] As with the 'mariage morganatique',[14] Beauvoir's identity as teacher becomes another role play, referred to as a 'mascarade'.[15] It could be argued that this narrative forms part of the older narrator's scathing stance towards her earlier positions: 'C'était notre condition de *jeunes intellectuels petits-bourgeois* qui nous incitait à nous croire inconditionnés' (*FA*, p. 28) (my

[11] *The Name of the Mother: Writing Illegitimacy* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 42, p. 188.

[12] Ibid., p. 62.

[13] See, for example, the description of their 'comédies, parodies, apologues' (*FA*, p. 25).

[14] Their 'mariage morganatique' represents an attempt to distance themselves from, and to mock the bourgeoisie: '[...] nous confirmait dans notre dédain de la grande vie [...]. Mais en même temps, nous prétendions nous en évader: les petits bourgeois désargentés que nous appelions M. et Mme. M. Organatique, ce n'était pas vraiment nous: jouant à nous mettre dans leur peau, nous nous distinguions d'eux' (*FA*, p. 27).

[15] Beauvoir writes: 'On a vu que je considérais aussi comme une mascarade mes occupations routinières et entre autres mon métier de professeur' (*FA*, p. 24).

emphasis).[16] A younger, naive self is contrasted with a more politically aware *chroniqueur* of war. If the narrator's stance as *engagée* still reveals her bourgeois roots, or divided interests, this becomes more apparent in her depiction of a private self, and in the mirroring of public and private events.

For instance, the older narrator's critique of her younger self includes explicit references to her lack of interest in political issues prior to the outbreak of the Second World War. This is contrasted with Sartre's perspective: 'Créer [...] c'était conférer au monde une nécessité en le reprenant à sa charge: selon moi, il fallait plutôt lui tourner le dos' (*FA*, p. 50). The presentation of such a critique highlights her earlier preoccupation with personal concerns, to the extent that the pain of leaving Sartre is shown to have blinded her to the fate of others living in more precarious circumstances:

> Dans le train, je me reprochai avec fureur mon aveugle optimisme, mon entêtement à mes projets. […] Cette fois la guerre semblait inévitable. Je refusai furieusement d'y croire; une catastrophe aussi imbécile ne pouvait pas *fondre sur moi* (*FA*, p. 383) (my emphasis).

The older narrator's self-flagellating criticisms of her refusal to confront reality contrast with her presentation elsewhere of the Sartre-Beauvoir partnership as an existentialist success story. Indeed, she admits at one point that in the absence of Sartre she withdrew from the world: 'Sartre parti pour Berlin, je me désintéressai tout à fait des affaires publiques' (*FA*, p. 180); 'le cours du monde [...] n'était tout de même pas mon affaire' (*FA*, p. 418).

Where descriptions of the author's move from bourgeois idealism to existentialism begin to take shape, a more personal agenda comes to light. Indeed, the depiction of Sartre in the narrative complicates Beauvoir's *pour-soi* public and private positionings, as she finds herself positioned as 'other', or in the place of the dreaded

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[16] The older narrator affirms her bourgeois positioning: 'Notre ouverture d'esprit, nous la devions à une culture et à des projets accessibles seulement à notre classe' (*FA*, p. 28).

en-soi.[17] However, initially, the construction of her life with Sartre is one of the most striking examples of her 'existentializing' drive. Using 'nous' insistently to describe their actions and beliefs, she interprets and conveys their partnership in a positive light:

> […] *nous* abordions toute situation avec l'idée qu'il *nous* appartenait de la façonner sans *nous* plier à aucun modèle. *Nous* avions *inventé nos* rapports, leur liberté, leur intimité, leur franchise [...] (*FA*, p. 412) (my emphasis).

The emphasis on the limitless possibilities afforded by the rejection of predetermined modes of thought underlines this perspective. At the time of writing, the narrator was adamant that first and foremost came the universal human subject: 'Je ne niais pas ma féminité, je ne l'assumais non plus: je n'y pensais pas' (*FA*, p. 418). It could be argued that in a bid for sexual equality and freedom she takes up the challenge of stepping into the (male) 'transcendent' position, believing it to be universal. The effective repression of all that is associated with *immanence* becomes clearer in this context and signals a strategy whereby the choice of language reveals a privileging of the rational in an existentialist discourse:

> *Nous* restâmes figés dans notre attitude *rationaliste* et *volontariste*; chez un individu *lucide*, pensions-nous, *la liberté triomphe* des traumatismes, des complexes, des souvenirs, des influences' (*FA*, p. 29) (my emphasis).
> […]
> Il nous importait d'abord de coïncider avec *nous-mêmes*. Plutôt que d'assigner théoriquement des limites à notre liberté, nous nous souciions pratiquement de la sauvegarder; car elle était en danger (*FA*, p. 29) (my emphasis).

Their relationship is described as a necessary love, and their pact of honesty promises to free her from false hopes and empty scruples and guarantee her, through Sartre, absolute security (*FA,* pp. 30-34). Their compact enables her, she claims, to ignore the past, and even to repress her anguish about the death of Zaza, her close friend and alter ego (*FA,* p. 35). Yet almost immediately her security appears threatened, anxiety

[17] Poisson traces the literary construction of the Sartre-Beauvoir partnership, focusing in the chapter entitled 'Le nous et ses fonctions' on letters and early autobiographical texts, in *Sartre et Beauvoir: du* je *au* nous, op. cit.

returns, and the narrator starts to suggest a disunity within the existentialist couple, a growing threat to her sense of her own identity, from the side of her ally and mentor.

Moi has argued that the function of the pacts in the narrative is to reconcile Beauvoir's 'fear of separation' and Sartre's desire for 'unlimited emotional and sexual freedom' by '[locating] the essence of their relationship at a transcendental level which by definition cannot be degraded by any particular action in the world'.[18] The narrator focuses on the individual's experiences as exemplar. Thus, comments such as 'faire de ma vie une expérience exemplaire où se refléterait le monde tout entier' (*FA*, p. 37)[19] corroborate Moi's analysis and suggest that the construction of the *être pour-soi* position functions as safeguard against being reduced to *immanence*, where the consciousness of the individual is denied. The identification with Sartre within a collective 'nous' voice forms part of an existentialist defence to preserve the self as *pour-soi* subject. Relationships with others are played down so that nothing detracts from the couple and their embodiment of the existentialist ideal. The descriptions of time spent with female friends and also with Bost are by contrast secondary to the portrayal of rendez-vous with Sartre.[20] His presence in the text therefore limits expression of the narrator's personal relationships with others. Descriptions of female friends such as Camille are filtered through Sartre's gaze and the narrator's commentary suggests the

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[18] *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 221. Moi has also argued that '[H]er emotional survival, it would seem, comes to depend on her power to satisfy the demands of the super-ego – to assert herself as a strong, self-reliant and creative woman – without exposing herself to more separation and loneliness [...]. In this context, her firm belief in her fundamental unity with Sartre turns out to be the cornerstone of a highly elaborate – and a remarkably effective – defensive strategy', ibid., pp. 226-27.

[19] See also references to the importance of action and choice: 'Nous mesurions la valeur d'un homme d'après ce qu'il accomplissait: ses actes et ses œuvres' (*FA*, p. 54). Her teaching for example, does not represent the submission to a destiny but, rather, the making of a choice ('[…] il ne me semblait pas subir un destin, mais l'avoir choisi' (*FA*, p. 244)). The focus is on the projection of self to the future: 'Nous réprouvions le présent au nom d'un avenir qui se réaliserait certainement [...]' (*FA*, p. 164).

[20] Keefe, in 'Autobiography and Biography: Simone de Beauvoir's Memoirs, Diaries and Letters', op. cit., has examined the involvement of Bost with Beauvoir, to which there are no allusions in *La Force de âge*, but which came to light in the posthumous publications.

inauthenticity of these lives, presented in counterpoint to the existentialist model.[21]

However, as suggested earlier, the 'pacte' initiated by Sartre is problematic. With no sense of disproportion, Beauvoir writes her personal catastrophe into the contemporary scenario of national betrayal. The presence of Sartre in the narrative threatens the narrator's sense of identity as she finds herself positioned as 'Other'. In fact, the narrator's treatment of her sister and of colleagues is very different from her submissive stance when in the company of Sartre, a positioning that has been analysed in detail by critics such as Le Dœuff and Moi.[22] Political pacts between states and the threat of war are effectively paralleled with personal pacts of honesty and loyalty with Sartre. His relationship with Olga Kosakievicz, the Russian pupil who forms the third part of the 'trio', casts its shadow over the narrator's happiness at a time when the Stalin-Hitler pact was striking fear into the hearts of many French citizens.[23] The writing records both the loss of Sartre's undivided attention and his symbolic position of 'ally' in a time of impending war, using a terminology which echoes the political situation between France and Russia: '[…] pendant ces journées il ne pensait plus à moi comme une alliée, et cette discordance empoisonnait l'air que je respirais' (*FA,* p. 299). As the political situation worsens, the trio is presented in increasing difficulties, as if private and public events were mirroring each other (*FA,* p. 327). The threat which Olga poses to Beauvoir, as a non-Western, same-sex outsider, is juxtaposed with the threat of war and the fear of the unknown potential of the Eastern bloc, articulating a sense of exclusion and dispossession (*FA,* p. 297). There is a blurring of boundaries between personal and political for both Sartre and Beauvoir: 'la situation politique, ses rapports avec Olga. J'eus peur' (*FA*, p. 313). Olga's entrance into Beauvoir's life is represented in terms of fracture ('[...] des fissures

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[21] Simone Jollivet, the actress, was known as Camille in the autobiographies, and referred to in the letters as 'Toulouse'. Camille reappears in *Tout compte fait,* where Beauvoir describes her degeneration and death. As potentially threatening female 'other', the description of her across the two volumes effectively reduces her to a model of the narcissistic madwoman.

[22] See *L'Etude et le rouet: des femmes, de la philosophie, etc.* (Paris: Seuil, 1989), and *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*, op. cit., respectively.

[23] See also her comment that '[…] nous inventâmes, avec moins de bonheur, le trio' (*FA*, p. 412).

avaient tout de suite craquelé ce bel édifice' (*FA*, p. 292)). The 'édifice' is not the external world and its apparent stability but the trio; this forces the narrator to question her supposedly unique and enduring relationship with Sartre, and indicates the first of many disjunctions relating to her sense of self with Sartre as 'nous'. In this private context the narrator admits, 'j'en souffris; sur ce plan, j'avais besoin de certitudes, le moindre doute me donnait le vertige' (*FA*, p. 298).

Furthermore, she describes her acquiescence to the preferences of Sartre, ranging from his suggestion that they separate for a number of years (*FA*, p. 31), to the proposal of the pacts which would enable him to introduce potential rival women friends into the sphere of the 'family'.[24] Alternatives to this dynamic are presented via the references to Beauvoir's role as mentor, for example, to Olga. In this context, she reverses her own position of being mentored by Sartre to a position of power by becoming 'quelqu'un de précieux et même d'unique' (*FA*, p. 264) for her students. Rather than bringing the private into the public sphere, a technique that Jelinek identifies as generic to women's autobiography, the narrator does the opposite, masking private concerns by couching them in narratives concerned with public events.[25] If history is understood to signify both *Histoire* and *histoire*, as both public account and private construction, then this opens the text up to readings which take into account the interconnections, rather than oppositions, between the public and personal narratives.

In addition, the intellectualized unity between Sartre and Beauvoir via the 'nous' perspective also elides the question of the extent to which gender and attitudes towards the mind/body relationship shape their conceptions of self. In fact, their different views of the body undermine the presentation of a unified stance. Beauvoir is influenced by Sartrean associations of the female body and *immanence*, but also diverges from Sartre's view of the mind/body relationship. Critics who have examined the influence of Sartre's theorizing on Beauvoir's thinking identify points of contrast

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[24] See, for example, Beauvoir's positioning as 'other' to Sartre and Marie Girard in Berlin (*FA*, p. 212).

[25] See Jelinek's politicizing of the private sphere in *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1980), pp. 7-8.

and contradiction and it could be argued that Beauvoir's gendered concerns sit uneasily with her construction of *pour-soi* subject.[26] Indeed, Sartre's associations of the *en-soi* and the 'feminine', elaborated in *L'Être et le néant,*[27] have been the subject of detailed feminist readings which identify a 'hiérarchie ontologique' whereby, in Le Dœuff's words, '[...] la femme c'est l'En-Soi et l'Homme le Pour-Soi, et ce pour l'éternité. Les rôles masculin/féminin déduits de cette phénoménologie mettent la femme hors-Sujet'.[28] Sartre's rejection of the *être en-soi* position as undesirable and his subsequent equations of *immanence* with women's sexuality seem to colour Beauvoir's attitudes. In this regard Julienne-Caffié, who remarked that '[L]e corps, c'est le périssable et l'incertain, la menace permanente de l'immanence et des forces aveugles', argued that Beauvoir's writing of self is linked with a desire to write against the corporeal, immanence and death:

> Au-delà du corps, s'élève une protestation contre la mort qui gouverne toute l'œuvre de Simone de Beauvoir. [...] sans doute y a-t-il, derrière l'inerte et l'opaque que sont et la conscience d'autrui et le corps, quelque chose à

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[26] See, for example, Lloyd, who refers to his 'notorious treatment of the female body as the epitome of immanence', in 'Masters, Slaves and Others', *Radical Philosophy* (Summer 1983), 2-9 (p. 8); Green, 'Femininity and Transcendence', *Australian Feminist Studies*, 10 (Summer 1989), 85-96; and Moi, who argues: 'For him the in-itself is feminine and the for-itself masculine. And the contradiction of Simone de Beauvoir's discourse is that, in a work devoted to the denunciation of thinking by sexual analogy, she unwittingly perpetuates the practice', in 'Existentialism and Feminism: the Rhetoric of Biology in *The Second Sex*', *Oxford Literary Review*, 8, 1-2 (1986), 88-95 (p. 94). Finally, Seigfried argues: 'She [Beauvoir] thus relies on the same categories that have systematically distorted women's subjectivity with the unacceptable consequence that women must strive for a male defined transcendence to be truly human and anything specifically female is, in that measure, immanent', in 'Gender-specific Values', *The Philosophical Forum*, 15, 4 (Summer 1984), 425-41 (p. 434).

[27] He writes: 'Le visqueux c'est la revanche de l'En-soi. Revanche douceâtre et féminine qui se symbolisera sur un autre plan par la qualité de *sucré*. [...] Le visqueux sucré est l'idéal du visqueux; il symbolise la mort sucrée du Pour-soi [...]', *L'Être et le néant* (Paris: Gallimard, collection Tel, 1943), p. 671.

[28] Le Dœuff, 'De l'existentialisme au Deuxième Sexe' in *Magazine littéraire*, 145 (February 1979), pp. 18-21 (p. 19). This analysis later formed part of *L'Etude et le rouet*, op. cit. Le Dœuff gives numerous examples of Sartre's privileging of the male-defined, patriarchal position of subject and negative references to female sexuality and experience.

> atteindre d'où viendra le salut. L'échappée sur le transcendant, c'est, une fois de plus, la négation de ses chaînes.[29]

It is true that her writing *against the body*, viewed as obstacle, is exemplified by a refusal to recognize its needs:

> J'étais obligée d'admettre une vérité que depuis mon adolescence j'essayais de masquer: ses appétits débordaient ma volonté [...]. Par le silence auquel il me contraignait, mon corps, au lieu d'un trait d'union, devenait un obstacle et je lui en avais une brûlante rancune (*FA*, p. 76).

However, the narrator's apparent reluctance to identify herself as *female embodied* subject (*FA*, p. 78) contrasts with the representations of her quests to cover new ground, both physically and mentally. For the latter scenario, the body is the ultimate expression of non-death as exemplified by her *pour-soi* positioning in the world. This contrasts with her fear of being reduced to absence in relation to Sartre. As a result, the narrator's construction of self is founded on a denial of her gender as she writes against the female as *immanence*, staking her claim for the right to occupy the (male-identified) transcendental subject position. And yet the acknowledgement by the narrator of the differences between Sartre's and her own conceptions of the body and its involuntary actions presents again a revealing point of contrast which jars with the unifying 'nous' voice:

> Nous n'avions pas tout à fait la même manière de nous y intéresser. Je me perdais dans mes admirations, mes joies. [...] lui, il gardait son sang-froid et il essayait de traduire verbalement ce qu'il voyait.
> [...]
> Il n'était pas enclin aux battements de coeur, aux frissons, aux vertiges, à tous ces mouvements désordonnés du corps qui paralysent le langage [...] il accordait plus de prix à ce qu'il appelait 'les abstraits émotionnels' [...] et il en restait assez détaché pour tenter de la fixer dans des phrases (*FA*, pp. 49).

According to Sartre, all emotions should be controlled, or cannot be expressed. The narrator, however, adopts a different stance and attributes more importance to raw emotions which cannot always be expressed in words. Therefore, although she reinforces the image of

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[29] *Simone de Beauvoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), p. 92.

the unified couple (as part of her 'existentializing' strategy), close reading of the text points to narrative diversions in which a self-avowed *avidité* reveals personal goals and individual concerns, to be explored below in the context of her 'fuites'. The latter would appear to express a desire for physical *transcendence* outwith a frame of reference dependent solely on the legacy of Sartrean philosophy.

We have seen that the narrator's positionings as public and private self reveal the setting up of her autobiographical project. Past, present, and future constructions of self reinforce the feminist bid for independence and combine with the presentation of an existentialist project shaped by Sartre. However, the early idealism is countered by anguish, and the propping up of the existentialist 'nous' voice with Sartre does not mask intriguing differences. In the second part of this chapter, Beauvoir's 'autothanatographizing' of these issues will be explored. This involves analysis of the ways in which the auto*bio*graphical project is shadowed by an auto*thanato*graphical one, where pessimism can be read through the positioning of self-to-the-future, and where the future is not the goal of the existentialist project, but the reality of death.

Beauvoir's *fuites*: Public and Private Itineraries and Inventories

Voyages and the freedom to explore contrast with the conditions during wartime and open up the spatial and temporal dimensions of the text.[30] Beauvoir's self-representation across public and private spheres highlights problematic negotiations of identity and reveals interesting paradoxes in her conceptions of self. Indeed, for Cliche, Beauvoir's forays as 'exploratrice' are a significant part of her depiction of self and denote an independence from Sartre which forms part of an imaginary 'vie rêvée':

> Dans les années 30, période de sa vie racontée dans *La Force de l'âge*, le réel était tellement accessoire pour elle qui se plongeait dans une sorte de vie rêvée, que Sartre la taxait de 'schizophrène'. En effet, elle exploite à fond la ligne de fuite nomade, aventurière, vagabonde. [...] *Le nomadisme*,

[30] During the period over which *La Force de l'âge* was written, Cayron calculated that Beauvoir had made fifty-six trips, in *La Nature chez Simone de Beauvoir*, op. cit., pp. 36-37. See also Hibbs, *L'Espace dans les romans de Simone de Beauvoir* (Stanford French and Italian Studies 59: Alma Libri, 1988).

> pour utiliser un régime de signes deleuzien, *atteint son apogée dans ce récit autobiographique* [...] (my emphasis).[31]

The narrator's descriptions of escapes from an everyday (and an increasingly politically charged) reality are revealed through often lyrical depictions of the individual's *projet* as quest, described as 'cette nouvelle espèce de liberté' (*FA*, p. 97), and which ignore the political sphere. Where Sankovitch has referred to Beauvoir's love of discovery and desire to see and do everything by assigning the name 'Quester' to this aspect of her self, Ozouf has noted a recuperative strategy as part of this self-avowed *avidité*.[32] If we consider the narrator's desire to bring all contingent objects to significance ('arracher les choses à leur nuit' (*FA*, p. 107)), the philosophical import of her strategy can again be traced back to its existentialist roots. The concrete matter of life is described as being brought into existence by her gaze, and landscapes and the precise moment at which she sees them, she describes, 'n'appartenaient qu'à moi' (*FA*, 107). Furthermore, the discovery of new territory and unknowns is accompanied by a concomitant desire to conquer nothingness and death (*le néant*).

For example, the description of the narrator's first trip abroad with Sartre to Spain in 1931 conveys the compulsive, frenetic energy associated with the discovery of new spaces: 'Avant de quitter Barcelone, je compulsai avec frénésie le *Guide Bleu*; j'aurais voulu voir littéralement tout' (*FA*, p. 100). However, it is the descriptions of expeditions alone that illustrate most clearly the desire to push a *physical* self to the limits of endurance:

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[31] 'La Figure de l'exploratrice dans le discours de Simone de Beauvoir', in *Simone de Beauvoir Studies*, 6 (1989-90), 58-67 (pp. 61-62).

[32] In 'Simone de Beauvoir: The Giant, the Scapegoat and the Quester', in *French Women Writers and the Book* (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1988), pp. 101-24, and *Les Mots des femmes* (Paris: Fayard, 1995), p. 298, respectively. Ozouf comments: 'Faute de l'avoir, elle s'acharne à gaver son emploi du temps, à remplir les temps morts et à tout consigner, l'accessoire avec l'essentiel. Ainsi s'explique l'étrange activité récupératrice qu'elle a toujours menée [...]' (p. 302); '[…] mais le simple lecteur y perçoit surtout l'activité d'une chiffonnière maniaque […]' (p. 302). See also Cabanis, who links Beauvoir's *avidité* to 'un trait de caractère oral; aussi bien la richesse du monde engrangée par son appétit de connaissances lui apparaît-elle devant la page blanche comme une foisonnante totalité à restituer', in 'Beauvoir par elle-même', *Preuves*, 122 (April 1961), in Julienne-Caffié, op. cit., p. 128.

> Je n'imaginais pas, comme jadis en Limousin, que les choses eussent besoin de ma présence; mais j'avais *entrepris* de tout connaître du monde et le temps m'était mesuré, je ne voulais pas *gaspiller* un instant. [...] l'univers ne décourageait pas *mon appétit* et j'étais décidée à en dresser un inventaire complet. J'ignorais les demi-mesures; dans les régions que nous n'avions pas rejetées, par décret, au néant, je n'établissais pas de hiérarchies; de n'importe quoi *j'attendais tout* [...] (*FA*, p. 103) (my emphasis).

In these quotations the choice of vocabulary reveals the hunger to learn and to discover: *avidité* is transformed here into an oral gluttony in which all is waiting to be devoured or digested. The narrator's determination to make use of every moment of her time becomes an obsessional drive to dominate her surroundings as existentialist consciousness and to create inventories in a bid to control such experiences.[33] The desire to explore and to cover new ground thus begins primarily as an existentialist quest.

However, the terms of reference come under scrutiny in these contexts. Through the narrative of travel describing, for example, Beauvoir's many excursions in the South of France at the time when she was teaching in Marseilles, the narrator writes of a physically transcending self which defies the existentialist categories of cerebral *pour-soi* versus embodied *en-soi*. In this respect generic considerations come into play since the personal travel diary and the public travelogue oscillate between a personal writing of self as embodied but immune to weakness, and a desire to chart the territory from the perspective of public self-in-the-world.

To illustrate these ideas further, the narrator's description of an accident during a walking trip exemplifies her negotiations with embodiment and her gradual coming to terms with the reality of physical limitations. Such encounters function as a mirror reflecting her vulnerability and the failure of any self-imposed *volonté* to

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[33] See also: 'On a vu avec quel acharnement je poussai mes investigations. J'ai gardé longtemps l'illusion que la vérité absolue des choses se donnait à ma conscience, et à elle seule – exception faite, peut-être, pour Sartre' (*FA*, p. 410); '[...] en moi seule l'existence s'y organisait de manière exemplaire; chaque détail bénéficiait de cette perfection. Aussi était-il urgent pour l'univers comme pour moi que je connaisse tout de lui' (*FA*, p. 410).

safeguard against unpredictable life events: '[...] le sentier promis par le *Guide Bleu* était presque invisible et bientôt je fus terrorisée par l'à-pic [...] je restai plaquée à la pente, le cœur battant. [...] la fatigue, la peur me faisaient chanceler' (*FA*, p. 344); 'Soudain, le sol me manqua, je glissai [...]. […] je m'étonnai d'avoir éprouvé si peu d'émotion quand j'avais cru frôler la mort' (*FA*, pp. 344-45). Similarly, an accident during a cycling trip functions as a symbol of the narrator's loss of control and physical degeneration: 'Et je mourus' (*FA*, p. 567); 'Je me regardai dans une glace; j'avais perdu une dent, un de mes yeux était fermé, mon visage avait doublé de volume et la peau était enflée […]' (*FA*, p. 568). This seemingly trivial incident takes on a greater importance when the narrator draws general conclusions about mortality from it. Like Montaigne's description in the *Essais* of his confrontation with death as a result of a horse-riding accident, the narrator uses the incident to explore her fear of death.[34] The witnessing of oneself as (dying) Other, in the position of *être en-soi*, thus brings about this intertextual autobiographical mirroring.

It is also in the context of descriptions of trips, not alone but with others, that the narrator first attributes the term 'schizophrénie' to herself. She uses it to highlight her refusal to accept that others, especially female others, could also impose their will. As they impinge on her space to explore, the narrator's freedom is thwarted. In her treatment of her sister Poupette (Hélène) and fellow teacher Mme Tourmelin during walking expeditions, for example, she reveals the lack of concern for others which her dogmatic adhesion to certain principles had confirmed, retold from the position of hindsight.[35]

In addition, the various generic spaces in the text which present opportunities for more personal expressions of self in the first-person are affected by the role of Sartre in the narrative, and his textual presence could be seen to exert a limiting or censorial influence on the author's philosophical journeying. In these cases the narrator accepts a more passive role, with the effect that the personal travel-diary style of the Beauvoirian 'je' opposes the political travelogue of the now familiar 'nous'. When trips with Sartre are recounted (for example to Spain, Italy and Eastern Europe), the

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[34] See Villey, *Les Essais de Michel de Montaigne* (Paris: Nizet, 1972), p. 122.

[35] See for example *FA*, pp. 107-8, and pp. 113-14.

narrative has a tendency to focus on the political and contrasts with expressions of physical fulfilment in depictions of solitary excursions. The narrator makes a point of conveying Sartre's less enthusiastic reaction to discovering new places, or, in her words, to privileging the moment and 'la présence des choses'. She continues: 'De toute façon cette divergence entre nous devait se perpétuer longtemps; je tenais d'abord à la vie, dans sa présence immédiate, et Sartre d'abord à l'écriture' (*FA*, p. 168).[36] In this context, the mood and style of the descriptions of trips reflect increasingly negative concerns: references to disappointing trips become omens of the war while also reflecting a sense of guilt that the narrator was a witness to the atrocities of the war, but did not anticipate its severity.

In this uncertain context, increasingly frequent obligations to change plans, as demonstrated in the shortened stay in Brittany and the decision not to visit Vienna in 1934, shake the framework on which the self is founded.[37] In the case of Vienna, political considerations overrule the narrator's desire to cover new territory when they discover that the chancellor, Dollfuss, has been assassinated by the Nazis: '[...] Vienne en deuil [...] ne serait plus Vienne. J'hésitai, par pure schizophrénie à changer nos plans, mais Sartre refusa catégoriquement d'aller s'ennuyer dans une ville défigurée par un drame absurde' (*FA*, pp. 221-23). Only if the narrator turns her back on the political sphere, as she tries to do in her description of trips to Strasbourg and Munich, is it possible to return to the security of a personal travel diary.[38] The increasing number of

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[36] This is nonetheless followed by the qualification, 'Cependant, comme je voulais écrire et qu'il se plaisait à vivre, nous n'entrions que rarement en conflit (*FA*, p. 168).

[37] For example, the dismal gloom of the trip to Brittany indicates that Beauvoir's position of *pour-soi* invincibility is untenable: '[...] la réalité déçut pour une fois mes espérances [...]. J'infligeai à Sartre quarante kilomètres de marche [...]. Il pleuvait à Brest [...]' (*FA*, p. 127); 'Pour finir, le mauvais temps nous a chassés de Quimper et nous sommes rentrés à Paris, deux jours avant la date prévue: il était tout à fait extraordinaire que je déroge si gravement à mes plans; la pluie *m'avait vaincue*' (*FA*, pp. 127-28) (my emphasis).

[38] Initially, the narrator tries to turn her back on political realities via travel ('[…] nous tournâmes le dos à la tragédie, nous partîmes pour Munich' (*FA*, p. 223); 'je me fermai à la politique pour goûter sans arrière-pensée Strasbourg' (*FA*, p. 226)). Yet she still cannot escape images of a changing political reality in both Germany and France (*FA*, p. 223, p. 226). A trip to Morocco only serves to fuel a sense of guilt as they witness poverty and fear: references are made 'des hordes désespérées' (*FA*, p.

negative images which are portrayed becomes a distinguishing feature of trips with Sartre.[39] In Paris also, the narrator's admission of their difficulties in communication and differences of opinion contrasts with the avid filling of absence through the writing of her own affirmations of a robust self via writing and trips taken alone.[40] Thus the cohesion of the 'nous' shows signs of strain as the narrator begins to question her earlier belief that 'on ne fait qu'un'.

Generally, then, the depictions of travel reveal many of the narrator's preoccupations, namely her desire to escape not only war, death and representations of death, but also the threat of death of the self. Travel represents the desire to create a transcendental self-to-the-future experiencing a series of events 'pour la première fois'. These often romanticized expeditions alone, portrayed in a travel-diary style, offer escape from self-definition as Other and contrast with the narrative of political events embodied in the 'nous' travelogues with Sartre.

If we return to the interruption of the Occupation on the narrator's life, we find that its depiction provides a stark contrast to earlier evocations of freedom. The idea of conquering new territory through travel that is reinforced in the early chapters and labelled a new kind of freedom contrasts with the wartime scenario. In this period of *restricted* travel, the narrator's depiction of the self-as-writer comes to the fore. This includes a theorization of her increasingly public role as writer, a stance that is confirmed towards the end of the text when she refers to the publication of *L'Invitée* as a defining moment that propels her into the public sphere. This new-found identity as writer which emerges during the Occupation enables the narrator to make an existentialist claim to have finally achieved authenticity, in the form of an older, wiser, and more politicized self constructed within her autobiography.

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380), and they are relieved to leave: 'Une pierre nous tomba du coeur quand nous quittâmes l'enfer du Sud' (*FA*, p. 381).

[39] For example in Greece she describes, 'Puis ce fut Corinthe, qui nous ennuya' (*FA*, p. 356). See also a description of a trip to the south of England where increasing differences of opinion are articulated (*FA*, p. 166).

[40] See *FA*, pp. 243-45.

To recap, we have seen that earlier *fuites* had often been accompanied by lyrical descriptions which offered an alternative representation of self not tied to the 'nous' narrative or trapped in disabling self-definition as Other. They presented an exultant, vigorous body depicted in a real material landscape. The war narrative, in contrast, presents the constraints of the Occupation in Paris and the narrator's realization that her freedom is now necessarily limited. She is unable to choose exactly where she should go, just as privately, her desire to have exclusive rights to Sartre and the ability to impose her influence upon others is thwarted. Green argues that Beauvoir's loss of identity makes the production of a coherent narrative impossible and that her journal is a record of the experience of waiting for the return of an absent Other. For Green, the situation portrayed in the wartime journal could be defined as a 'feminine one'.[41] I would argue rather that it is in the absence of Sartre and the narrative constructed as 'nous' that she finds her own voice as writer.[42] More specifically, the urge to write is fuelled by both the external horrors of war and an overriding sense of failure: 'La littérature apparaît lorsque quelque chose dans la vie se dérègle [...]. […] Mes consignes de travail demeurèrent creuses jusqu'au jour où une menace pesa sur lui et où je retrouvai dans l'anxiété une certaine solitude' (*FA*, p. 416). This is reiterated at the end of *La Force de l'âge* when the narrator reflects upon the necessity of the writing act:

> […] c'est seulement quand *une faille* s'était creusée dans mon expérience que j'avais pu prendre du recul et en parler. Depuis la déclaration de guerre, […] la littérature m'était devenue aussi nécessaire que l'air que je respirais (*FA*, p. 693) (my emphasis).

The writing of a *journal intime* functions as a war memoir in its recording of day-to-day events, but also provides a means for personal self-expression, often in response to anxiety and loneliness (*FA*, p.

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[41] 'Writing War in the Feminine: de Beauvoir and Duras', *Journal of European Studies*, 23 (1993), 223-37 (pp. 231-32).

[42] Houlding argues that Beauvoir's experiences during the Occupation led her to reflect upon the meaning of sexual difference in her own life, in 'Simone de Beauvoir: From the Second World War to *The Second Sex*', *L'Esprit créateur*, 33, 1 (1993), 39-51 (p. 41).

433).[43] Writing offers an escape from the bleakness of the present and immediate future, and the limitations to explore French territory bring the focus back to a textual world where the narrator is in control of the ground to be covered. In this context, the constraints of wartime combined with the need to occupy her time act as a positive force on the writer: 'Si jamais le monde, ma vie, la littérature reprenaient un sens, je me reprocherais les mois, les années perdus à ne rien faire' (*FA*, p. 537). Indeed, the material historical moment of the Occupation is a key turning point in *La Force de l'âge* and forces the narrator to confront important ethical questions concerning her understanding of herself, her relationship to others and her role as writer.[44] Thus she describes her position as horrified spectator during the Occupation and explores issues of political commitment and personal responsibility.

In these sections of the text, the private sphere is inextricably linked to the writing project and the concerns of war often mirror personal crises. In these points of slippage, a private *pour-soi* identity can be traced as the narrator's personal autobiographical voice is enunciated in the writing of the *journal intime* and the travel diary. However, *La Force de l'âge* also contains many passages describing the substance of Beauvoir's fiction. Emphasis on this fictional output offers an alternative medium through which the narrator explores, via her *romans engagés*, questions of autonomy, responsibility and commitment, most notably as regards *Le Sang des autres*. In this text, Hélène, in whom the narrator claims to have put most of herself, is accused of being indifferent to her fate and that of the world, viewing the Occupation with the serene impartiality of History (*FA*, p. 620). In *La Force de l'âge* the narrator's reference to the writing of her

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[43] This forms most of chapter six. The beginning of a new book, in this case, *L'Invitée*, represents a retreat into the imaginary and an escape from day-to-day contingencies ('l'argile quotidienne' (*FA*, p. 393)).

[44] Beauvoir expresses her frustration with her earlier imperfect understanding of the individual's role in society in a lecture delivered in Japan in 1966. Here she comments on her depoliticized identity and classes herself disparagingly with the rest of her French intellectual contemporaries: '[…] entre 1929 et 1938 j'étais dépolitisée, je me suis très peu occupée de politique; eh bien! si j'avais à refaire la deuxième partie de mes mémoires, *La Force de l'âge*, je mettrais bien davantage l'accent sur cette indifférence; elle me définit comme une intellectuelle bourgeoise française de cette époque-là, les intellectuels français de l'époque étant pour la plupart dépolitisés […]', in 'Mon expérience d'écrivain', *Les Écrits de Simone de Beauvoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), pp. 439-57 (p. 452).

'période morale' is described as the point at which 'l'Histoire m'a saisie pour ne plus me lâcher' (*FA*, p. 409).[45] In this way she personalizes a collective experience and presents the various stages of both her political and personal *prise de conscience*.

The Occupation can also be shown to offer a parallel to Beauvoir's explorations of self and other in the fictional works. For instance, writing Olga's metaphorical death in fiction through the character of Xavière in *L'Invitée* is associated with the regaining of a personal sense of autonomy ('[…] je retrouvai ma propre autonomie' (*FA*, p. 387)). Indeed, Xavière's death is cited as 'le moteur et la raison d'être du roman tout entier' (*FA*, p. 388) and the 'valeur cathartique' (*FA*, p. 387) assigned to this act by the author suggests her use of female characters in a purgative way in her texts.[46] Attempts to exorcize the threat posed by others (Olga's entry into the narrator's life, for example) are transposed into writing with the effect that *La Force de l'âge* contains many passages describing the substance of the fiction. These in turn promote the image of a writerly self independent from Sartre. Metaphorical threats to the narrator's subjectivity resurface throughout the narrative, echoing the Hegelian dedication at the beginning of *L'Invitée*: 'Toute conscience poursuit la mort de l'autre'.[47] Writing thus offers a space in which imagined threats to subjectivity can be exorcized by the act of writing the deaths of others, especially where woman is located as 'autre'.

To the analysis of death narratives in the fictional texts can be added the depiction of the narrator's experiences of the actual deaths of others in commentaries in *La Force de l'âge*. These offer a further means through which to examine the narrator's 'existentializing' practice (in addition to the depictions of travel and the paradoxical effects of the Occupation on the narrator's understanding of herself and her role as writer and commentator). Fear of death as great

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[45] This writing includes *Les Bouches inutiles* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), *Le Sang des autres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), and *Tous les hommes sont mortels* (Paris: Gallimard, 1946).

[46] In this instance life and text intersect since Beauvoir's *petrifying* act through writing reduces Xavière to nothing, and restores a sense of wholeness against the threat of disintegration which is experienced as a result of Olga's entry into her life.

[47] See, for example, references to Simone Weil (*FA*, p. 147), who had been an initial inspiration for the self-other conflict explored in *L'Invitée*.

'unknown' is negotiated in writing, and the horror of war is juxtaposed with the more personal recounting of the deaths of personal friends, such as Nizan and Bourla. Marks has suggested that the horrors described are the public face of Beauvoir's personal anguish, whereby all images of death reflect her own mortality: 'The death of others reinforces the original intuition of nothingness. [...] Simone de Beauvoir's encounters with death have been encounters *with her own death*' (my emphasis).[48]

If the question of writing about the deaths of others is explored further, some differences of approach emerge. The death of her father, for instance, does not shock her in the way that the deaths of those her own age do, and the narrator identifies with the horror of their fate.[49] The writing of her friend and fellow-writer Nizan's death in Part two, and the narrator's self-condemnation regarding Bourla's death, create far greater anguish. Is the act of writing their deaths a confrontation with her own death, as Marks argues?[50] Certainly, the act of writing about death suggests a desire to control it or to exorcize its power, thereby enabling the author to share her fears with her readers. Having played no immediate role in the war, the narrator's sense of a divided self, as excluded *female* self who cannot be actively engaged, contrasts with the horror of Bourla and Nizan's *male* deaths, and also articulates, through their concerns, universal fears:

> Il [Nizan] nous intéressa surtout quand il aborda un thème qui entre tous lui tenait au coeur: la mort. Bien qu'il n'y fît jamais allusion, nous savions dans quelle angoisse il pouvait tomber à l'idée de disparaître un jour, pour toujours […] (*FA*, p. 237).

The narrator's attempts to temper her anxieties can be viewed in extracts such as the following on the death of Bourla. Here, we find references to the future and to anticipated 'bonheur':

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[48] *Encounters with Death* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1973), p. 99.

[49] This mirrors the narrator's reaction to her grandfather's death in the *Mémoires*, discussed in Chapter one.

[50] Marks refers to Beauvoir's evasions as 'the crux of the modern sensibility: the preoccupation with death and the inability to draw all the consequences from the fact and the shadow of mortality', in *Encounters with Death*, op. cit. (p. 127).

> [...] à cause de sa mort même, et de tout ce qu'elle signifiait, les moments où je me donnai au scandale, au désespoir prirent une intensité que je n'avais jamais connue: vraiment *infernale*. Mais dès que je m'en échappais, de nouveau j'étais happée par les splendeurs de l'avenir, et par tout ce qui composait au jour le jour mon bonheur (*FA*, p. 662) (my emphasis).

And yet the narrator returns to make connections between his death and her own mortality:

> Cette nuit informe, je la pressentais à travers des morts qui n'étaient pas la mienne. Il y avait eu Zaza; elle venait encore me visiter la nuit, avec son visage jauni sous sa capeline rose; il y avait eu Nizan, et tout près de moi Bourla. Bourla s'était enfoncé dans le silence, dans l'absence, et un jour nous avions su qu'il fallait donner à *cette absence* le nom de *mort* (*FA*, pp. 691-92) (my emphasis).
>
> [...]
>
> Un jour, cet *absent*, cet oublié, ce sera *moi* (*FA*, p. 692) (my emphasis).

In particular, the shock of death and youth affects the narrator's reaction to the deaths of her contemporaries. All three figures (Nizan, Bourla and Zaza) invade the private world of Beauvoir's subconscious mind, but are written into the public sphere of death. Their deaths contest existentialist beliefs that the conscious mind can override such fears and the description of the three figures in the narrator's dreams effectively prefigures her own fate.

In terms of gender differentiation, the writing of male deaths in terms of a narrative of war and the intersections of this narrative with the narrator's private experiences demonstrates a less marked opposition between public and private spheres. For example, Beauvoir's portrayal of 'private inner worlds' incorporates images that contrast with external description. Depictions of death as represented by the state of *immanence*, whether associated with the body, or with otherness, are pulled into public view, disrupting the existentialist project. However, the depiction of a psychiatric clinic as frightening experience and the narrator's distancing from her female friends, such as Louise Perron, who succumbs to madness, presents a space in the text in which madness and involuntary, uncontrollable aspects of life, which have been traditionally confined to the hidden 'private sphere'

as unspeakable taboos, are foregrounded.[51] The feared position of *être en-soi* is highlighted in the narrator's discussion of madness, loss of control and hysteria, the latter often associated with women. These encounters also force her to confront the fact that the patients have little control over their minds, with few possibilities to act as 'transcendent selves'. Felman is one of a number of critics to deconstruct such associations, showing the fear which underlies such identifications:

> The woman is 'madness' to the extent that she is Other, *different* from man. But madness is the absence of 'womanhood' to the extent that 'womanhood' is what resembles the Masculine equivalent, in the polar division of sexual roles. If so the woman is 'madness' since the woman is *difference*; but 'madness' is 'non-woman' since madness is the *lack of resemblance*. What the narcissistic economy of the Masculine universal equivalent tries to eliminate, under the label 'madness' is nothing other than *feminine difference*.[52]

Beauvoir's depictions of the clinic would seem to place her on the side of the masculine universal in this instance. Louise Perron's story represents the opposite of the 'transcendental self': she is the embodiment of *être en-soi* and demonstrates through her actions the dangers of living 'in bad faith'. The narrator's positioning of herself as diametrically opposed to Perron (and by extension, madness) is thus a means by which she preserves her own sense of self.

Indeed, the narrator's efforts to dominate illness throughout the text show her determination not to succumb to any physical weakness or vulnerability, as was noted earlier. Yet her confrontations with her own and others' illness denote moments in which the individual is at the mercy of his body. When illness strikes, it is the shock of seeing herself as Other that horrifies the narrator.[53] '[J]e

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[51] Perron is based on her fellow teacher in Rouen, Renée Ballon, who was infatuated with André Malraux, known in the text as 'J. B'.

[52] In 'Women and Madness: the Critical Fallacy', *Diacritics*, 5 (1975), 2-10 (p. 8), in Meaney, *(Un)Like Subjects: Women, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 73. See also Felman's full-length study, *Writing and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985).

[53] This sense of alienation is conveyed by her words: '[...] l'autre brusquement, c'était moi; comme tous les autres, j'étais pour tous les autres une autre. Oui, on m'avait

n'allais pas céder à un microbe' (*FA*, p. 333), she claims. Fears of witnessing the self as 'object' predominate and a number of 'brushes with death' are reconstructed to show death as transformational element, reifying the body from subject to object. I have argued that both the narrator's actual encounters with death, and the metaphorical threats to her own sense of self, expressed in the thanatological images of *La Force de l'âge*, force her to acknowledge her own mortality and to neutralize the threat in writing. Thus, Beauvoir writes herself against death as *être en-soi* in the context of both public and private concerns. As the earlier analysis suggested, her expressions of self as writer, in changing circumstances and given the increasing role of death as shaping principle, bring into question the success of an existentialist autobiographical project based on the notion of freedom as ultimate goal.

Writing the Fracturing Self: Rhetoric and Genres

The central argument of this chapter is that *La Force de l'âge* reveals a fracturing self in a fracturing text which is caught between autobiography and autothanatography. In this final section, the plotting of Beauvoir's narrative positions as past, present and future self, and the structural frames of such positionings will be explored in more detail. Beginning with questions of narrative voice, the perspective of the older, less idealistic narrator can be contrasted with the younger voice of bourgeois idealism. These textual selves interact in a particular time and space, revealing Janus-like 'je vécue' and 'je qui parle' multiple speaking positions which criss-cross each other in complex ways. Indeed, these changing perspectives demonstrate the intersections of the autobiographical project as existentialist act, and the autothanatography as negotiation of self in the face of death. As we have seen in discussions of depictions of the self under the Occupation, a distanced older narrator draws attention to the changes in the representation of self over the years, punctuated by major turning points. The author writing in middle-age recalls her life as young adult, therefore automatically a distance imposes itself between the narrator and narratee, highlighting the intersections of various speaking selves. In emphasizing the choices made over the years, a model of self-development is mapped out in an attempt to encourage

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arrachée à ma vie, à sa sécurité, pour me jeter dans un no man's land où tout était possible [...]' (*FA*, p. 334).

the reader to assimilate the wider framework of success as hers. The narrator lists the major events of her emancipation in 1929, reinforcing this personal triumph by repeating the possessive: '[…] la fin de *mes* études, *mon* émancipation économique, *mon* départ de la maison paternelle, la liquidation de *mes* anciennes amitiés et *ma* rencontre avec Sartre a ouvert évidemment pour *moi* une ère nouvelle' (*FA*, p. 409) (my emphasis). The move from bourgeois idealism to existentialist action is clearly signposted to the reader in the text, and is structurally at its centre, representing the hingepoint between Part one and Part two. These structures reinforce the positioning of a public self within a specific time and space in history.

This older narrator shows how the period of the Occupation marks a turning point in making her aware of her identity, not as an individual free to act as she pleases, but as part of a collective French identity subject to external pressures and constraints. Issues of both political engagement and personal involvement come to light, as public and private concerns can be shown to mirror each other at key moments in the text, and to serve to complicate initial presentations of an existentialist self. A pattern emerges which suggests that Beauvoir's sense of identity in *La Force de l'âge* is constantly under threat. For example, comments on major changes in 1939 undermine earlier optimistic stances. The older narrator serves a useful purpose in being able to criticize the apparent insularity and naivety of the younger narrator as presented at the beginning of the text.[54] Warning signals are dropped in the text that the 'projet à venir' is not always viewed in a positive light and, like the narrator of the *Mémoires*, statements are often tinged with irony, guilt or cynicism.

Autothanatographically, narrative perspective is doubly interesting, as all drives to narrative imply the reality of hindsight, while also implicating the shadows of death which problematize depictions of the present and future in the text. The 'existentializing' *avidité* that takes the narrator out of the confines of the public war narrative, and also offers an escape into a private world of memory as

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[54] For example, she writes: 'Je demeurai pénétrée de l'idéalisme et de l'esthétisme bourgeois. Surtout, mon entêtement schizophrénique au bonheur me rendit aveugle à la réalité politique' (*FA*, p. 414). This narrative technique is reminiscent of the one employed by Sarraute in *Enfance* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), in which the plausibility of recounted events is questioned by one of the narrative voices.

memoir, was examined in the second section. Narrative perspectives which, rather than focusing on the uniqueness of the self's experiences, replace the first-person singular by a more distanced 'on', present a further complication of *pour-soi* representation. This apparent universalizing of self mingles with notions of immobility and with an absence of the physical materiality of the earlier *fuites*. The narrator describes a death of self ('Je me quittais; je ne devenais pas une autre, mais je disparaissais' (*FA*, p. 103)), and the escape from linear timeframes points to the apprehension of a space distinct from the chronological narrative:

> A Avila, le matin, j'ai repoussé les volets de ma chambre; j'ai vu, contre le bleu du ciel, des tours superbement dressées; passé, avenir, tout s'est évanoui; il n'y avait plus qu'*une glorieuse présence*: la mienne, celle de ces remparts, c'était la même et elle *défiait* le temps. Bien souvent, au cours de ces premiers voyages, de semblables bonheurs *m'ont pétrifiée* (*FA*, pp. 103-4) (my emphasis).[55]

A related strategy is the attempt to ritualize time in the present by opposing celebrations (the *fête*) with the war.[56] Here, the *fête* is viewed as apotheosis and recompense. It provides a moment of ritualized reconstruction of a particular moment held in time and space.[57] Towards the end of *La Force de l'âge*, the narrator refers to the Liberation parties as one such escape from the future:

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[55] See also the reference to time-defying structures in an Italian town – these take on a political significance: 'Mais la présence de Mussolini écrasait la ville [...]. La nuit, on ne voyait plus personne dans les rues; cette ville, où les siècles pétrifiés triomphaient superbement du néant, retombait dans l'absence [...]' (*FA*, p. 178).

[56] Moubachir's analysis of 'la fête' is as follows: 'La fête permet à l'existence de s'affirmer positivement, absolument, déjouant ainsi cette fatalité existentielle qui est d'être de n'être pas', in *Simone de Beauvoir ou le souci de différence* (Paris: Seghers, 1972), p. 28. She also cites Beauvoir's discussion of its role in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* as a means to 'arrêter le mouvement de la transcendance, de poser la fin comme fin' (p. 143). See also Audet, who referred to its symbolic role in *Les Mandarins*: 'La fête chez Simone de Beauvoir revêt toujours un sens rituel, devient une sorte d'exorcisme temporaire de la mort', in *Simone de Beauvoir face à la mort* (Lausanne: L'Age d'homme, 1979), p. 59.

[57] Beauvoir even draws attention to its special status by including a footnote citing Gennari's focus on the role of the *fête* in her writing and refers to Starobinski's study of the significance of the *fête* for Rousseau in *La Transparence et l'obstacle*, again aligning herself with the French autobiographical canon.

> Pour moi, la fête est avant tout une ardente apothéose du présent, en face de l'inquiétude de l'avenir [...]. L'horizon, au loin, reste toujours brouillé, les menaces s'y mêlent aux promesses et c'est pourquoi toute fête est pathétique: elle affronte cette ambiguïté et *ne l'esquive pas*. [...] il y a toujours *un goût mortel* au fond des ivresses vivantes, mais la mort, pendant *un moment fulgurant*, est *réduite à rien* (*FA*, pp. 655-56) (my emphasis).

As final example, Beauvoir's desire to lose herself in the role of *another*, 'à devenir une ombre qui transpercerait les coeurs et qui les hanterait' (*FA*, p. 417), represents a further fissure of the positive 'bio'.

What is the significance of these diverse timeframes in which the oppositional role of *présence*, as a kind of anti-*fuite*, represents a desire for immobility, or *petrification*, in time? Meaney has quoted Beauvoir's negative references to repetition as *immanence* in counterpoint to Kristeva's notion of time:

> Cyclical time can be associated with stultifying 'immanence' (deB, 1972: 94) or with the danger of petrification [...]. It could be described as the space to which women are banished when they are exiled from history. Kristeva describes it [Women's time] spectacularly differently, reclaiming it as a space dizzying in its vastness rather than as 'confinement or restriction to a narrow round of uncreative or repetitious duties' (de B, 1972: 63).[58]

The Beauvoirian death-drive is interlinked both with existential notions and a *negativity* which disrupts a linear, univocal autobiographical model. However, the fragmentary genres and diverse narrative voices in *La Force de l'âge* represent a space where Beauvoir enunciates her women's time, in both negative and positive terms.

For example, the *intermède* at the end of Part one in *La Force de l'âge* reveals the narrator's desire to 'freeze' the narrative in time, by interrupting the chronological, linear narrative with present tense

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[58] In *(Un)Like Subjects: Women, Theory, Fiction*, op. cit., p. 89. Meaney refers to Kristeva's article, 'Le Temps des femmes', *34/44: Cahiers de recherche de sciences des textes et documents*, 5 (1979), 5-19.

direct addresses to the reader.[59] In the closing lines, the narrator admits that 'on ne peut jamais se connaître mais seulement se raconter' (*FA*, p. 419). This undermines received notions about autobiography's purpose to convey the life of a self, but also suggests the narrator's need to 'tell all'. The narrator's avowal is suggestive of an anti-pact in its impossibility to yield 'truth', with disruptive narrative styles framing such passages.[60] In this section of the text, the older narrator pauses to reflect on the writing act and on the presentation of a younger, idealistic self in the period recounted in Part one, before moving onto Part two. The latter describes the dramatic realization, in the wake of the Second World War, that the ideals of the pre-war years no longer match changing circumstances. The *intermède* mirrors the 'coupure' which, as revealed in the quotation below, marked the onset of war and the wake of a new era:

> Il n'est pas possible d'assigner un jour, une semaine, ni même un mois à la conversion qui s'opéra alors en moi. Mais il est certain que le printemps 1939 marque dans ma vie une coupure. Je renonçai à mon individualisme [...]. J'appris la solidarité. Avant d'aborder le récit de cette nouvelle période, je voudrais faire un rapide bilan de ce que m'avaient apporté ces dix années (*FA*, p. 409).

These lines suggest a desire on the part of the narrator to delay contemplation of the subsequent years, since they risk clouding the ideals and aspirations of the younger self, and bring the reality of death even closer.

Futher evidence of a 'petrification' of the narrative comes at the end of *La Force de l'âge*, when the narrator opens up the subject of death. Marks observed that the style changes when the narrator muses upon such questions, suggesting that '[T]he superiority of Beauvoir's style when she writes about death and the absurd reveals her fundamental obsession'.[61] The self-reflexive narrator uses language in a more contemplative manner and the writing act is deemed to be her 'recours suprême contre la mort' (*FA*, p. 689). The

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[59] Heath argues that the prologue, *intermède*, and epilogue form the 'metanarratives' of Beauvoir's text, in *Simone de Beauvoir*, op. cit., pp. 58-59.

[60] The narrator admits to the imaginary reader at the end of Part one: 'Il est arbitraire de découper sa vie en tranches' (*FA*, p. 409).

[61] Marks, *Encounters with Death*, op. cit., p. 4.

image of a 'barre noire', repeated three times in this passage, and first referred to by Perron, a *female* character, becomes a *leitmotif* in the autobiographical *œuvre*, and indicates that the narrator has to come to terms with the prospect of the future *as* death. The image also suggests the boundaries of the text itself, enclosed within the parameters of existentialist thought, where straining at the edges are those styles and genres which go beyond traditional autobiographical territory:

> [...] l'image banale d'une barre noire, arrêtant la série des espaces mesurés qui représentent les années [...]. Et j'avais peur de vieillir: non parce que mon visage changerait et que mes forces diminueraient, mais à cause de ce goût qui allait s'épaissir et qui pourrirait chaque instant, à cause de cette barre noire qui se rapprocherait, inexorablement (*FA*, p. 691).

This glimpse of the threat of ageing also provides a thematic link to the third volume, *La Force des choses*, in which the narrator continues to explore ageing, death and the female self.

As discussed earlier, the *intermède*, and the genres of travel diary and *journal intime*, have been shown to play an important role in Beauvoir's public and private expressions of self. It is to these genres as structuring frames of the autobio(thanato)graphical representation that the discussion now turns. In fact, the travelogue, *chronique*, *journal intime*, and critiques of the fiction all contribute to innovations of the genre. The role of travel as *fuite* has already proved to be a significant factor in revealing the narrator's explorations of self in time and space. The inclusion of the travel genre as writing strategy further elucidates Beauvoir's project. Traditionally, the use of travel literature offered the writer the chance to explore new ground or to colonize it as unknown Other. In this case it also reveals an existential search for selfhood, and encompasses *pour-soi* and *en-soi* positionings in the context of the self-as-writer. Maclean's comments on its symbolic role within both autobiographical and autothanatographical spheres in her analysis of Flora Tristan are also pertinent:

> [...] the voyage was as much a mystical as a physical rite of passage. [...] The voyage readily becomes the quest and lends itself as much to autography, which I have characterized as a self-portrait to live by, as to

> autothanatography, which I have suggested is rather a self-portrait to die by, a way of guiding reception and perception.[62]

The threat of the death of the self informs the narrator's explorations, and the quest for affirmation of self against death proves to be a driving force.

If we consider the travel writing in *La Force de l'âge* more closely, it can be divided into the categories of travelogue, which incorporates political commentary, and the more personal travel diary-style narrative, as explored in section two. These two modes express, I would suggest, both a desire for legitimation and for self-expression. For instance the former, the political travelogue, represented in large part by the Sartre-Beauvoir travel narrative, resembles the travel memoir as desire to record events for posterity, and to present an authentic account. The travel diary-style narrative, on the other hand, operates in a different way by echoing the nostalgic childhood intertext that romanticizes a lost past. As romantic escapism it is reminiscent of the Romantic intertexts in the *Mémoires*.[63] Yet the travel diary-style narrative also offers a space for the expression of a physical transcendence of self which exceeds the existentialist framework of cerebral *pour-soi* or embodied *en-soi*. The prime focus is on the individual's exercizing of freedom through the pursuit of projects of self-discovery. However, within this framework the embodied or ageing self is excluded. The narrator's sister, Poupette, and her colleague, Mme Tourmelin, represent the sacrifices as they are written out of the text and into metaphorical death. The various forms of the travel genre are as much a philosophical as a geographical journeying of self in the exploration and appropriation of territories of self and other. They draw upon both the public and personal genres of travelogue as genre which colonizes otherness, as diary promoting self-contemplation to the exclusion of the other, and as memoir which offers romanticized parallels between the present and a lost past.

Where the travelogue and travel diary-style narrative represented an escape from Paris, the *journal intime* represents the stifling lack of freedom felt by the narrator during this time in Paris.

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[62] *The Name of the Mother: Writing Illegitimacy*, op. cit., p. 106.

[63] See, for example, the descriptions in *FA*, pp. 106-7.

Yet both genres have one common element: they also serve as a means for the narrator to avoid writing about herself by focusing instead on the world around her. She fills the pages with the contingency of life as an alternative embodiment of the *être en-soi*. Under the Occupation, the diary paradoxically offers Beauvoir an occupation. The writing of death thus fulfils a function in bulking out the narrative as a defence against absence and death. Descriptions of external events not only recount the political situation at the time but also serve as a means for the narrator to efface herself and her fears of the future by presenting a *résumé* of events devoid of self-involvement. This is a paradoxical overturning of a genre commonly known for its self-confessional nature and is particularly noticeable in the war diary in Part two, chapter seven. Indeed, Lasocki, referring to the diary as death writing, argued that Beauvoir intended to 'conjurer la mort par la littérature'.[64] As journal, it offers moments of respite from writing the existentialist self since the narrator also describes uncertainties about her identity, as suggested by the phrase, 'Moi, je m'abolissais' (*FA*, p. 526). Such moments indicate again the fractures between the death-centred, adult self and an idealistic, younger self.

However, the war diary brings a certain meaning to Beauvoir's life in its capacity to offer a surrogate activity. Although the inclusion of excerpts from the time strengthens the authenticity of the account, many sections describing political events are devoid of life, stylistically; perhaps out of a sense of duty, or desperation, the narrator continues to fill the blank page of the diary.[65] In addition, the fact that the narrator blends the genre of war diary as public record of events (a traditionally male domain), and the personal memoir as journal (a traditionally female one), creates a hybrid form of writing, neither specifically public nor private. In this amalgam, we find the clipped phrases and flat narrative conveying a stagnating present, locked into the structures of wartime confinement, and embodying *immanence* itself.

The *chronique*, a quite different generic mode (a factual written account of important or historical events in the order of their occurrence), is deployed for similar reasons, and represents an

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[64] *Simone de Beauvoir ou l'entreprise d'écrire* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1971), p. 17.

[65] In the diary, adjectives such as 'fade' and 'insipide' recur.

authentication of private experience in the public domain. For both the *journal intime* and the *chronique*, the narrator's upturning of the traditional war correspondent mode is striking in its inclusion of both external and personal material. All kinds of references are included (lists of people, places, books, plays and films, for example), which creates a 'bulking out' of the text. In fact, like the *journal intime*, the voice of a female autobiographical self is often absent. One might question why there is a need to recount everything from the trivial to the important. Could this frenetic effort to register everything betray a deep-seated fear of the contingent?[66] Through the writing act, the narrator ascribes significance to these events while privileging the present, delaying the future, and preserving the events of the past by holding the narrative in a textual present. The details also provide an alternative reality to the concerns of war and the bleakness of the future, the *bilans* themselves encapsulating perhaps the meaningless of life itself in view of war and death.

Mauriac, referring to the frenetic pace of these sections, linked Beauvoir's writing to her loss of faith.[67] However, Chambers's examination of what he calls 'the etcetera principle' might shed new light on this generic feature of *La Force de l'âge*: he theorizes textual disorder, or 'descriptions' tendency to resolve into a list' by referring to this genre of apparent randomness and episodicity as 'loiterature'.[68] He believes that a 'loiterly' narrative offers an alternative epistemology, more akin to disorder than order and open to diversity. This strategy contrasts with the specifically intertextual canonical strategy operating in *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, as explored in Chapter one. In *La Force de l'âge*, the contrasting narrative genres serve to fragment the autobiographical *œuvre* and to undermine the text as representation of a coherent life in a structured world. If the mirrorings of memoir, *Bildungsroman*, *récit d'enfance* and *récit*

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[66] Lists of books and films are exhaustive. See, for example, *FA*, pp. 62-63.

[67] He writes: 'Pour l'écrivain qui a décidé d'être heureux, il s'agit toujours d'une recherche raisonnée, déliberée et très souvent [...] à partir du renoncement à Dieu: ce qui donnne à leur recherche je ne sais quoi d'un peu frénétique, du luciférien', in 'La Poursuite du bonheur', in *Le Figaro littéraire*, 21 January 1961, p. 1, p. 10.

[68] He writes: '[...] syntax and structure are de-emphasized in favour of the paradigmatic, list-like practices of description and episodic plotting, which has something of this pleasurable "time out" quality of fugue', in 'The Etcetera Principle: Narrative and the Paradigmatic', *French Literature Series*, 21 (1994), 1-24 (p. 7, p. 21).

existentialiste in the *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* stretched definitions of autobiography, in *La Force de l'âge* the diversity of genres also reveals a wide variety of different modes of self-expression.

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La Force de l'âge might appear at first glance to offer itself as a theoretical testing-ground for existentialist presentations of self. Beauvoir systematically constructs and contrasts her pre- and post-war scenarios, and presents existentialist models of the self-in-the-world and self-as-writer, emphasizing projects founded in freedom and action. Yet the instability of styles in *La Force de l'âge* contrasts with expected 'norms' of autobiography as defined by canonical directives. *La Force de l'âge*, as hybrid text, is not a retrospective chronological *récit* written from one narrative perspective. This is underlined by the role of fragmentational genres in subverting the linear, chronological narrative. Genre play serves as an attempt to preserve the contingency of life on paper, but also acts as a mirroring device reflecting the author's search for a textual space to construct herself as universal, public, *pour-soi* writer.

Preoccupations with a changing self in time and space undermine the existentialist framework of the liberation of self and liberation of countries. An apprehension of death rather than life as central axe determines the narrator's understanding of her relations with others and the world. There is an underlying theme of anxiety, and it is only when the author feels 'en exil' that she is driven to write. It is death, originally defined as *absence* which Beauvoir tries to transform into a tangible *présence* through her writing, by grounding it or substantiating it. This, of course, is an impossible task, and one that incites her to persist in trying to master or control death as the ultimate unknowable. Thus we find that the autothanatographical act is one that will never be completed. The writing act defers death and each time a new book is started the spectre of death is pushed to one side, but momentarily. As Martha Evans has remarked:

> […] Simone de Beauvoir leaves her writing hovering somewhere between life and death, male and female, never finished, never completed, always in

> need of being recommenced, restated, rewritten. And as long as her writing is unfinished, Beauvoir's own death, like Xavière's seems deferred.[69]

In addition, Beauvoir's identification with her female characters, called her 'shadow writing' in which, as Evans suggests, she exposes 'the messy parts of herself', contrasts with the author's 'universalizing' stance as writer.[70] Likewise, Chambers's definition of 'loiterature' as disorder within the narrative highlights well the disruptions within the chronological narrative.[71] These occur, for example, when the narrator presents an image of herself as 'schizophrène', referring to the 'double personnalité' attributed by Sartre that encompasses 'le Castor' and 'Mlle de Beauvoir' (described as 'une assez déplaisante jeune femme' (*FA*, p. 26)). The narrator interprets her schizophrenic self to be a manifestation of an aberrant optimism that refuses to accept the will of others (*FA*, p. 108).[72] This goes some way to explaining her somewhat antagonistic stance towards Olga and women 'others'. Not only as subjects, but specifically as female subjects, they represent a threat to the narrator's sense of self.[73] Where Sartre labelled Beauvoir 'schizophrène' for her intransigence, we could also read this stance as an expression of her frustration with rigid systems of thinking.[74]

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[69] 'Simone de Beauvoir: The Murderer', in *Masks of Tradition: Women and the Politics of Writing in 20th Century France* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1987), pp. 75-101 (p. 98).

[70] Ibid., p. 98.

[71] The term 'loiterature' also encompasses the illustrations of the contingent facticity of *en-soi*, exemplified in the descriptive, list-like sections of the text.

[72] 'Cette "schizophrénie" m'apparaît comme une forme extrême et aberrante de mon optimisme; je refusais, comme à vingt ans, que "la vie eût d'autres volontés que les miennes"' (*FA*, p. 108).

[73] Indeed, Meaney, in her exploration of the myth of the Medusa in relation to the texts of Cixous and Lessing, referred to R.D. Laing's work, *The Divided Self* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), arguing that schizophrenia is 'rooted in ontological insecurity and a fear of petrification and engulfment'; '[…] the schizophrenic subject is a fearful Perseus, and what Perseus most fears is the mother and maternal', in *(Un)Like Subjects: Women, Theory, Fiction*, op. cit., p. 17. In Beauvoir's case, there are strong links between the existentialist notion of *immanence* and fear of petrification. In addition, the desire for 'petrification' of the narrative, in a bid to 'freeze' time, can also be traced.

[74] In contrast, Moi argues that it was 'only when Beauvoir's "schizophrenia" started to fall apart that she truly came to writing', in *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*, op. cit., p. 230.

The fractures in Beauvoir's 'schizophrenic' text (ranging from the narratives of distanced commentator to past bourgeois selves, to woman narrator-as-writer) indicate a desire to be a part of male-defined traditions, yet also to reject them. The construction of the universal *pour-soi* writer as *committed* self, fulfilling a public duty to recount the war, is countered by references to the gendered body, to desire and death (via, for example, discussion of female characters in the fiction, or resurrection of female figures such as Zaza from the past). In the process of writing her self, the narrator explores her relation to the limits of life as defined by birth and death, and engages with the prospect of a changing, ageing self. In this respect, writing clearly offers an escape from linear time and irreparable loss, aptly summed up in the war diary: '[...] on dirait que c'est le temps qui travaille, et lui seul' (*FA*, p. 461). Likewise, Beauvoir's confrontations with time and ageing intensify, as the narrator of *La Force de l'age* affirms:

> J'avais un autre souci: je vieillissais. [...] de temps en temps, je me plaignais qu'autour de moi tout se décolorât: je ne sens plus rien, gémissais-je. [...] j'avais une impression *d'irréparable perte* (*FA*, p. 239) (my emphasis).

If *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* explored time and death in its chronology of the 'jeune fille rangée', *La Force de l'âge* adds the exploration of space to the autothanatography in this *mise-en-scène* and *mise-à-mort* of existentialist autobiography and categories of self, and in which the female *embodied* autobiographical self tries to find a place of expression. The autothanatography begins to overshadow notions of autobiography in this volume through the articulations of Beauvoir's positionings 'against death', and in the place of death as *absence*. The writing drive, as drive against death as *en-soi*, is reinforced further by the interchanging, fracturing subject positions represented by the perspectives of 'on' and 'nous'. It has also been argued that the first-person singular narrative voice emerges within the text and introduces the notion of a self-to-the-*future as death*. In this respect, *La Force de l'âge* stands as key volume within the autobiography: it articulates the shift from existentialist autobiography to the structures of autothanatography. In chapter three, Beauvoir's expressions of self in *La Force des choses* will be explored

in the light of the narrator's inescapable confrontations with her older, gendered self.

CHAPTER III

La Force des choses

La Force des choses depicts Beauvoir's explorations of self in a wider frame, with the Liberation of France and the greater facility of travel bringing a geopolitical dimension to the autobiography. The fact that two major conflicts, the end of the Second World War in 1945, and the resolution of the Algerian war in 1962, act as the book ends of *La Force des choses*, imposes a certain structure on the text which is not coincidental. These conflicts inform not only the direction and identity of France, as recounted by the author; they also shape her own confrontation with a changing self in changing times. Freedom and liberation would appear, then, to be the obvious focal points of the text.

If *La Force de l'âge* revealed a schizophrenic self as manifestation of the limitations of existentialist positionings, does *La Force des choses* offer the writer new spaces in which to explore the self? Hibbs has referred to explorations of space in Beauvoir's novels, but little attention has been devoted to its function in the autobiographical writing, where it could be argued that explorations of identity are concerned with both changing temporal *and* spatial dimensions.[1] In fact, this sequel is probably best known for its famous conclusion in which the narrator suggested that she had been duped: 'Cependant, tournant un regard incrédule vers cette crédule adolescente, je mesure avec stupeur à quel point j'ai été flouée' (*FC*, II, p. 508). Many interpret Beauvoir's words as an admission of defeat (with analysis ranging from references to existentialism, to personal disappointments and ageing, to the Algerian war), some suggesting that the words are evidence of the failure of the writer's own project.[2]

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[1] In *L'Espace dans les romans de Simone de Beauvoir* (Stanford: Anma Libri, 1988).

[2] Hewitt draws attention to Beauvoir's own interpretation in *Tout compte fait* of the 'flouée' exclamation, noting that she 'referred to the disappointments of old age, but she reads it instead as a generalized indictment of a bourgeois ideal she had been trying to live', in *Autobiographical Tightropes* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), p. 45, whereas Rétif associates this cry of despair with the position of the 'femme mutilée' of Beauvoir's later fiction, in 'Le Miroir brisé', *Les Temps modernes*, 592 (February-March 1997), 133-58. See also Margolin, 'Simone de Beauvoir, Jeanson, Sartre et le Sartrisme', *Études françaises*, 3 (1967), 61-73 (p. 67); Fallaize, 'Reception Problems for Women Writers: the Case of Simone de Beauvoir',

La Force des choses stands not only as third volume in the series but as mirror text of *La Force de l'âge*. It increasingly distorts the earlier representations of self in the light of Beauvoir's confrontations with an ageing self and the contradictions which arise from the positionings as *pour-soi* identity and confrontations with *immanence*. Indeed, the fracturing self depicted in *La Force de l'âge* becomes increasingly weighed down by a politics of writing where Beauvoir's role as famous writer and public figure, having received the *Prix Goncourt* in 1954 for *Les Mandarins*, influences her own perception of her duty to society, and her sense of responsibility to speak out on behalf of others. As the narrator commented herself: 'Votre histoire, on la connaît, m'a-t-on dit aussi, car à partir de 44 elle est devenue publique' (*FC*, I, p. 7). This informs her stance to a greater extent, and her relationship with her public becomes more important and indeed necessary to her in her autobiographical writing.

The titles of the two central volumes convey a sense of continuity through repetition of the words 'la force', but they also invite speculation about Beauvoir's changing stance in the world, from 'la force de *l'âge*', to 'la force des *choses*'. The change would appear to suggest an increasing concern with the materiality of life, moving from a 'golden age' of happiness and interest in new ways of living to an awareness of increasing physical, material and philosophical constraints on the narrator.[3] In this volume, the narrator's presentation of her political projects with Sartre within an existentialist framework of political engagement contrasts with the more personal narratives in the first-person. In the latter the narrator admits her horror of an ageing self and her recognition that personal

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in *Women and Representation*, ed. by D. Knight and J. Still (Women Teaching French Occasional Papers, 3, Nottingham: 1995), pp. 43-56 (p. 47); and Murphy, 'Beauvoir and the Algerian War: Towards a Postcolonial Ethics', in *Feminist Interpretations of Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. by Margaret A. Simons (Pennsylvania: Penn State UP, 1995), pp. 263-97.

[3] As far as the latter is concerned, readings focusing on the presentation of existentialism in *La Force des choses* figure widely in earlier Beauvoir criticism. See, for example, Descubes, *Connaître Simone de Beauvoir* (Paris: Resma, 1979); Jeanson, *Simone de Beauvoir ou l'entreprise de vivre* (Paris: Seuil, 1966); and Julienne-Caffié's selected extracts from reviews of *La Force des choses* in *Simone de Beauvoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).

and political projects are circumscribed by mitigating factors that limit the possibilities for action.

Turning specifically to the exploration of *thanatos* in this work, Marks, in her study on Beauvoir's obsession with death, highlighted the author's focus on individuals' deaths – those of Jouvet, Lucienne, Vian and Camus, for example – as a means of coming to terms with mortality.[4] However, in these analyses the role that gender plays in the depiction of these deaths is not the focus; instead, Marks argues that the deaths in general bring the author to the point where she accepts her own death. As introductory response to the themes of death and ageing which increasingly dominate Beauvoir's autobiographical works, a citation from Hegel offers a particularly apt introduction to *La Force des choses*: 'La *mort* est ce qu'il y a de plus terrible et maintenir *l'œuvre de la mort* est ce qui demande la plus grande *force*' (my emphasis).[5] The quotation brings together Beauvoir's concern with death, writing, and 'la force des choses'. The reference to the relationship between writing and death, and to the effort required ('la force'), echoes the titles of the two central volumes, and yet when compared with Beauvoir's own words about the necessity of the writing act – 'La création est aventure, elle est jeunesse et liberté' (*FC*, II, p. 504) – the gulf between the two statements highlights competing concerns. This chapter aims to explore the more complex motives behind Beauvoir's writing by going beyond the purely thematic 'fear of death' to open up the wider implications and interpretations of *La Force des choses* as autothanatography.

In the first part of this chapter the text is examined as a spatialization of a 'politics of self'. In this regard, some critics believe that the autobiography reveals exclusively Beauvoir's position as political figure and *engagée*, independent from Sartre. Others argue that the only authentic reading would focus on her specifically 'female' private concerns, ignoring the documentary genre altogether. I will suggest that it is precisely Beauvoir's willingness to take on both these

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[4] See Chapter eight in *Encounters with Death* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1973).

[5] Cited in Surya, *Georges Bataille, la mort à l'œuvre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), p. 1. See Lundgren-Gothlin's chapters on the influence of Hegel and Kojève's thinking on Beauvoir in *Sex and Existence: Simone de Beauvoir's 'The Second Sex'* (London: The Athlone Press, 1996), pp. 56-82.

roles, and to reveal in her writing the interplay between personal and universal concerns, that results in a life history which presents a valuable account of the evolution of a woman intellectual in twentieth-century France. More specifically, as far as the private sphere is concerned, within this analysis the narrator's varied depictions of personal relationships and her confrontations with others' deaths will be discussed and explored in the light of Marks' earlier comments.

In the second section, a 'rhetoric of death' in *La Force des choses* will be traced. This identifies the language and structures of degeneration and death in the narrative which problematize the 'existentializing' drive. Thus the examination of stylistic features, such as the use of tenses, imagery, and the narrator's compulsive bulking out of the text, aims to uncover a writing practice that fills the places of absence between discrete blocks of narrative in the text. This also involves an examination of shifts in the use of narrative voice, by comparing the voice of the public writer figure, where a determinedly universal rather than a female identity is inscribed (often in conjunction with the joint political stance as 'nous' with Sartre), with the depiction in the first-person of an ageing, gendered self. In the context of the latter, relationships with known and unknown 'others' will be shown to inform the narrator's development of a discourse of ageing. In terms of narrative voice, the splitting of past, present and future selves in the text undermines the notion of a consistent, unified voice and complicates the presentation of a transcendent self looking towards future projects. This is influenced by the fact that narrator and narratees 'catch up' with themselves in the textual present, unlike the *Mémoires* and, to a lesser extent, *La Force de l'âge,* where there is a greater distance between the period written about and the time of writing. This catching up with a 'future past' shifts the focus from autobiography as linear project to a less stable process of alternating points of view. Within such explorations of identity, questions of nationality, gender, and profession will be examined, and the question whether evidence of an autobiographical *absence* of narrative voice can in any way inform us about Beauvoir's project will also be broached.

The third section of this chapter then focuses on the function of diverse genres within the volume, in particular the use of the documentary mode, and the narrator's role as authority figure or

'social critic'. The deformation of autobiography in its conventional sense becomes increasingly important as regards *La Force des choses*; as hybrid text its stylistic variations in tense and mode of writing reveal underlying preoccupations through the documentary, travelogue and diary. The author takes them to the limits of the understood confines of their respective genres and in the process reveals competing public and private concerns.

The 'Politics of Self'

Just as the Occupation played an important role thematically and structurally in *La Force de l'âge*, in this work the Liberation of Paris is the starting point and runs as key theme throughout the text. A global space is opened up through references to war and death in Spain and Portugal, and to the wake of Hiroshima. In the short, final paragraphs to the first chapter, attention is drawn to the evolution of Beauvoir's thinking; in particular, the message that the idealistic period heralded in *La Force de l'âge* is now over, is made clear. The opening also announces a change in philosophical outlook: fears of repetition, or of a repetitious existence, which had previously been associated with the undesirable position of immanence, are now presented in a more positive light: 'Je commençai à goûter le plaisir de re-voir. J'avais vraiment changé d'âge' (*FC*, I, p. 58).

In these opening sections of the text, the Liberation is presented, paradoxically, in both positive and negative terms. From the outset, descriptions of Liberation parties are tinged with melancholy and despair, and attempts to efface the past prove to be an impossible task. Instead, images of death recur:

> [...] c'était fête; une drôle de fête; proche, affreux, *le passé nous hantait; devant l'avenir, l'espoir et le doute nous divisaient*; la sérénité ne pouvait pas être notre lot; le monde contrariait nos passions. Il fallait oublier, et oublier même que nous oubliions (*FC*, I, p. 57) (my emphasis).

The end of the war represents less a time for celebration than a time of mourning, as suggested by the graphic image used by the narrator to compare the war to a cumbersome corpse which finds no place to be buried: 'La guerre était finie: elle nous restait sur le bras comme un grand cadavre encombrant, et il n'y avait nulle place au monde où l'enterrer' (*FC*, I, pp. 50-51). The narrator takes on the weight of the

memory of death and war, by implication an ineradicable source of guilt for those who have survived.

As mentioned earlier, discussion of one war is gradually overtaken by analysis of the onset of another: the Algerian war. Although not the sole focus of *La Force des choses*, it serves as framework and canvas for the narrator's explorations of self. In general, numerous descriptions of trips (for example, to Italy and England) reveal an increased awareness of a politicized self.[6] In an interview with Gobeil, Beauvoir highlighted the significance of such trips: 'J'ai découvert en somme le malheur du monde lentement, puis de plus en plus, et finalement, je l'ai éprouvé surtout à propos de la guerre d'Algérie et lors de mes voyages'.[7] Critical appraisals of Beauvoir's attitude to the Algerian war have ranged from those who, like Hewitt, argue that she remained politically voiceless, very much in the shadow of Sartre, to those who emphasize the importance of the autobiography from a postcolonial point of view.[8] Among the latter, Murphy has argued that critics such as Bair are wrong to cite Beauvoir's interest in Algeria as incidental and dependent on Sartre, as this downplays her pro-Algerian stance. In Murphy's eyes, the author's crucial intervention with support for Algeria's women rebels was 'a part of her political independence from Sartre and wholly her own'.[9] Heath has argued in a different vein that Beauvoir was protecting the private sphere, 'which entails the redrawing of the public/private dichotomy by subsuming the former into the latter. The private domain is staked out as a territory which is out of bounds to public gaze and to which only Beauvoir can grant access […]'.[10] However, the Algerian issue does not wholly dominate the text: it is introduced indirectly in the first part of *La Force des choses* in the

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[6] Keefe referred to her interest in travel abroad, arguing that 'she was happier outside France than within its borders for much of this period', in *Simone de Beauvoir: A Study of Her Writings* (London: Harrap, 1983), p. 39.

[7] In *Paris Review* (June 1965), in Julienne-Caffié, *Simone de Beauvoir*, op. cit., pp. 211-18 (p. 216).

[8] In *Autobiographical Tightropes: Simone de Beauvoir, Nathalie Sarraute, Marguerite Duras, Monique Wittig and Maryse Condé* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), p. 33.

[9] 'Beauvoir and the Algerian War: Towards a Postcolonial Ethics', in *Feminist Interpretations of Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. by Margaret A. Simons (Pennsylvania: Penn State UP, 1995), pp. 263-97 (p. 277).

[10] *Simone de Beauvoir* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p. 61.

wider context of Africa, and is dealt with only explicitly in the later chapters of the autobiography when the importance of Algeria as theme proper is revealed.

The precise nature of Beauvoir's political engagement and the historical veracity of her accounts are not the focus of the present study. Rather, I propose to place the emphasis on the author's presentation and assessment of herself and her relationship to French history in *La Force des choses* in an attempt to trace the links between public and private spheres and to understand the development of her position, given her politicization in *La Force de l'âge* in response to the Second World War. The autobiographical works constitute both textual constructions of self, whether as writer, lover or activist, and narrative representations of key historical events in France – a broad canvas, on which different selves, and public and personal histories, can be drawn and juxtaposed.

The Algeria narrative offers a means to explore both public and private concerns (the author's concerns about her apoliticism, for example, and also the important changes which have occurred in her personal life). The narrator explicitly situates herself within a dual framework: 'Mêlée beaucoup plus que naguère aux événements politiques, j'en parlerai davantage; mon récit n'en deviendra pas plus impersonnel [...] la manière dont au jour le jour l'histoire s'est donnée à moi est une aventure aussi singulière que mon évolution subjective' (*FC,* I, p. 8).[11] She claims that the war dominates her thoughts and dreams ('[...] envahir ma pensée, mon sommeil, mes humeurs' (*FC*, II, p. 120) and changes her perception not only of herself but of her place within a national and global context: 'Ma propre situation dans mon pays, dans le monde, dans mes rapports à moi-même s'en trouva bouleversée' (*FC*, II, p. 120). This involvement is developed further as she presents herself as an estranged participant in France's colonial history. '[J]e me sentis radicalement coupée de la masse de mes compatriotes' (*FC*, II, p. 40) is how the narrator describes her response to the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954. France's history with Algeria forces her to re-assess her situation in her own country, as she

[11] See also, 'Je savais à présent que mon sort était lié à celui de tous [...]' (*FC*, I, p. 15); 'En 43-44, j'étais investie par l'Histoire, et c'est à son niveau que j'entendais me placer [...]' (*FC*, I, p. 92).

considers her position as alienated Other: 'On m'avait traitée [...] d'anti-française: je le devins. Je ne tolérais plus mes concitoyens' (*FC*, II, p. 124).

In fact, a sense of alienation had already been prefigured in earlier descriptions of trips abroad, for example to the United States in the 1940s, where identifying herself as French was presented in negative terms: 'Une Française: ça signifiait une suspecte, une ingrate, presque une ennemie' (*FC*, I, p. 311). The narrator's response to events bound up with France's colonial history is presented as one which opposes what she perceives to be the dominant Gaullist point of view. An emphasis on the relativity of history mirrors the strategy adopted in *La Force de l'âge* and draws attention to the subjective nature of Beauvoir's representation: 'Un communiste, un gaulliste raconteraient autrement ces années; et aussi un manœuvre, un paysan, un colonel, un musicien' (*FC*, I, p. 10). It is through the eyes of the tortured Algerians that the narrator views herself 'avec les yeux des femmes vingt fois violées, des hommes aux os brisés, des enfants fous: une Française' (*FC*, II, p. 125). This alignment with those who are responsible for torture demonstrates the extent to which self-identity and national identity do not coincide, as the narrator describes herself as 'la sœur des tortionnaires, des incendiaires, des ratisseurs, des égorgeurs, des affameurs; je méritais leur haine puisque je pouvais dormir, écrire [...]' (*FC*, II, p. 145). Being against one's own country, and exiled within it, becomes the focus of her attention (*FC*, II, p. 177), and her sense of self is threatened as she finds herself situated as Other to the patriotic French citizen. De Gaulle's referendum is described as a collective suicide (*FC*, II, p. 230) which finally cuts her off from her own country (*FC*, II, p. 239).

The Algerian war is thus experienced as a 'drame personnel' (*FC*, II, p. 501). In a letter to Nelson Algren dated 2nd January 1959, Beauvoir discusses its impact on herself and Sartre in terms of a sense of disaffiliation and alienation: 'À cette France nouvelle nous n'appartenons plus, nous nous sentons devenus étrangers dans notre propre pays'.[12] Personal concerns are shown to mirror anxieties about political events in descriptions of the narrator's despondency: 'On n'a

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[12] *Lettres à Nelson Algren: Un Amour transatlantique, 1947-1964* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), p. 575.

guère le cœur à la littérature, dans cette France-ci. Et puis, je vieillis... Parfois la pensée que je pourrais ne plus vous revoir me fiche un coup au cœur’. In the autobiography, parallels are drawn between this period and the Occupation. In both cases a sense of confinement predominates and the narrator reinforces the fact that she feels alienated from her French compatriots: ‘J’avais aimé les foules: maintenant même les rues m’étaient hostiles, je me sentais aussi dépossédée qu’aux premiers temps de l’occupation’ (*FC*, II, p. 125).[13] The French uniformed officers inspire the same feelings as the sight of swastikas did during the war (*FC*, II, p. 146) and Paris becomes in the eyes of the narrator an occupied city again, with the focus now on the painful ties which bind her to the occupiers – her fellow citizens (*FC*, II, p. 146).

It is in this context that Beauvoir takes up the struggles of others as her own, as she had done in *Le Deuxième sexe*. In chapter ten she recounts her decision to help defend the Algerian resistance fighter, Djamila Boupacha, who had been tortured and wanted to press charges against her torturers. This would involve writing a book with Gisèle Halimi in her defence.[14] The involvement in the Boupacha case personalizes the war struggle in the text, expressing it as both a singular and a collective experience. Algeria also represents Beauvoir’s encounters with death on a grand scale; the death of regimes sharpens her awareness of her own circumstances and implicates her both on a personal level and as regards her stance as intellectual in the public sphere.

A second case study, less thematic than structural, focusing on Beauvoir’s depictions of herself, her relationships with others and her encounters with death, reinforces the idea that the public and private spheres interlink.[15] This encompasses the depiction of the author’s relationships with writers Jean-Paul Sartre, Nelson Algren and Claude Lanzmann, and reveals contrasting concerns. The relationship with Sartre remains the focal point of the narrative: after descriptions or references to Algren or Lanzmann, the reader’s attention is often drawn back to Sartre and Paris as central points of reference. If the

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[13] See also *FC*, II, p. 501.

[14] *Djamila Boupacha* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962).

[15] Political and private defeats also mirror each other. For example, a discussion of events in Korea is followed by an admission of the failure of Beauvoir’s play *Les Bouches inutiles*.

narrator refers to a visit to see Algren, the Chicago-based writer with whom she has a relationship in the post-war years until 1951, in the United States, then she also refers to Sartre in Paris and Berlin.[16] Both Algren and Lanzmann, fellow collaborator on *Les Temps modernes*, are inscribed in terms of the narrator's personal life, and are represented quite differently: 'Algren appartenait à un autre continent, Lanzmann à une autre génération' (*FC*, II, p. 16). Unlike her positioning with Sartre, the narrator places herself, as Okely and Heath have noted, at a spatial distance from Algren and a temporal distance from Lanzmann.[17]

Further analysis of the contrasting depictions of Sartre and Lanzmann reveals ways in which competing narratives intersect. For example, the portrayal of Sartre, where increasing references to illness, death and degeneration fill the text, contrasts starkly with the references to Lanzmann as younger partner. His embodiment of youthful vitality, which prompts the narrator to express herself in a more physical way, is reminiscent of her identification in the *Mémoires* with Herbaud's physicality, an identification which had contrasted with the more cerebral identifications with Sartre. In the context of her associations with Lanzmann, the narrator puts forward a representation of a rejuvenated self: no longer 'reléguée au pays des ombres' (*FC*, II, p. 9), she writes that with Lanzmann she is offered a new lease of life: '[...] si mon corps s'en accommodait, mon imagination ne s'y résignait pas. Quand une chance s'offrit de renaître encore une fois, je la saisis' (*FC*, II, p. 9). This consists of a physical reawakening ('J'avais retrouvé un corps' (*FC*, II, p. 10); 'nos corps se retrouvèrent dans la joie' (*FC*, II, p. 13)), in which his physicality and spontaneity contrast with her description of Sartre as 'puritain'. The gulf is further reinforced by the different spheres with which the two figures are associated. Where a trip to Holland with Sartre emphasizes intellectual pursuits and reveals some differences – 'Sartre et moi, nous ne menions plus tout à fait la même existence' (*FC*, II, p. 33) – references to Lanzmann emphasize recaptured youth ('jeunesse

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[16] In chapter three, for example, the America narrative is interspersed with descriptions of Paris that draw the reader back to this 'central' focal point.

[17] Both Okely and Heath drew attention to the fact that Beauvoir was separated from these two figures by the variables of space and time, in *Simone de Beauvoir: A Re-reading* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), pp. 141-42, and *Simone de Beauvoir*, op. cit., p. 85, respectively.

retrouvée' (*FC*, II, p. 33)). Sartre's relationship with Michelle Vian mirrors Beauvoir's with Lanzmann, with trips with Sartre juxtaposed with trips with Lanzmann.[18] However, where Sartre fills a political space in the narrative, Lanzmann's role is depicted in a more romantic light: the cerebral opposes the physical in a simplistic contrast, and yet the depiction of the latter suggests that his presence has made the narrator more aware of her physical bearing on the world. A narrative that allies Beauvoir primarily with Sartre and politics, and which props up the myth of the couple and downplays Sartre's female partners, is juxtaposed with references to Lanzmann's rejuvenating effect. This new lease of life is tempered by reminders of Sartre's illness ('il portait sa mort en lui' (*FC*, II, p. 45)), which trigger the acknowledgement of not only metaphysical but real encounters with death: 'Mais quelque chose d'irréversible était arrivé; la mort m'avait saisie; elle n'était plus un scandale métaphysique, mais une qualité de nos artères [...]' (*FC*, II, p. 45). If Lanzmann calls to mind reminiscences of happy moments at earlier stages in her life, he also, as younger partner, prompts the narrator to dwell on the future with death as the prospect. Thus descriptions of their life in the restrictive space of a Parisian flat, next to the cemetery, do not escape references to an increasing awareness of mortality embodied in the 'lit de mort' (*FC*, II, p. 94).

It can be seen, then, that depictions of the Algerian war, and of relationships with others, bring public and private concerns together through a focus on death as singular and collective experience. Further consideration of the narrator's commentaries on the deaths of others brings her changing perspectives into sharper focus, in particular, as far as differing depictions of male and female death and illness are concerned.

The deaths of several well-known male figures are recounted, some known to Beauvoir personally such as the writers Camus, Dullin, Fanon, Vian, and Richard Wright, and others not, such as Stalin and Brasillach. Dullin's death echoes Bourla's fate, recounted in *La Force de l'âge*, and the narrator's comments are indicative of her own regretful identification: '[…] âgé, souffrant, sa fin n'était pas

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[18] For example, the description of a trip to Spain with Lanzmann is followed by a revisiting of Strasbourg with Sartre (*FC*, II, pp. 48-51).

tragique comme celle de Bourla, mais j'avais de lui des souvenirs émus. Tout un pan de mon passé s'effondrait et j'eus l'impression que ma propre mort commençait' (*FC*, I, p. 273). Likewise Vian's death reminds her again of her own inescapable fate: 'Et j'ai compris que si rien en moi ne se révoltait, c'est que j'étais habituée déjà à ma propre mort' (*FC*, II, p. 254). Finally, although Camus's unexpected death in a car crash is initially downplayed ('Il n'était plus rien pour moi' (*FC*, II, p. 277)), the narrator laments a life that has now gone and, through his death, also imagines her own death:

> Ce n'était pas l'homme de cinquante ans que je regrettais [...] c'était le compagnon des années d'espoir [...] le jeune écrivain ambitieux, fou de la vie [...]. La mort le ressuscitait; pour lui le temps n'existait plus [...]. […] Tout me déchirait: cette misère, ce malheur, cette ville, le monde, et la vie, et la mort' (*FC*, II, p. 277).
> [...]
> […] je ne voyais plus que par ses yeux éteints; j'étais passée du côté où il n'y a rien [...] les choses qui continuaient d'être alors que je n'y étais plus; tout le jour je chancelai au bord de l'impossible expérience: toucher l'envers de ma propre absence (*FC*, II, p. 278).

To this fantasized death of self can be added further examples of depictions of male death. Richard Wright's sudden death of a heart attack (*FC*, II, p. 414) is followed in succession in this male series by the revelation of Merleau-Ponty's death, also from a heart attack: 'A Antibes, un coup de téléphone m'apprit la mort de Merleau-Ponty: pour lui aussi, soudain, un arrêt du coeur' (*FC*, II, pp. 414-15). The narrator explores via figures such as Camus and Fanon her own attitude towards death insofar as she relates these deaths to her situation by aligning herself with this *universal* human condition, but in fact places herself within a *masculine* series in which the deaths are all described as short, sharp shocks.

This depiction of male death can be contrasted with the less direct references to degeneration and illness, often associated with female friends. For example, Olga's illness underlines the narrative in Part one, and the death of Lucienne of cancer echoes the narrator's own concerns when she fears that she may have breast cancer (*FC*, I, p. 350). Lucienne's fate prompts the narrator's identification this time with a specifically female illness, depicted as slow process in contrast

to the abruptness of the deaths of male figures. In the text this incident is compounded by the narrator's sense of alienation from Sartre ('[...] il me paraissait plus lointain qu'il ne l'avait jamais été' (*FC*, I, p. 348)), and by the end of her relationship with Algren in the previous year (1951). For the first time the reality of a *physical* vulnerability is articulated, as the narrator's words suggest: 'Jusqu'alors, jamais je n'avais été menacée dans mon corps: en 1935, je n'avais pas connu la gravité de mon état. Pour la première fois je me crus en danger' (*FC*, I, p. 350).[19] In comparison with *La Force de l'âge*, where signs of illness or infirmity prompted the narrator to view herself as alienated Other, the illnesses and deaths of female friends are recounted differently from male deaths: they are ongoing in time, not specific events. The narrator's experiences of death 'by proxy' are presented, then, both as specific event and ongoing progression towards death. As noted earlier, the latter is reinforced by the references to the tortured Algerian women who are subjected to protracted torture and suffering and to whom the narrator, in her capacity as French citizen, feels a sense of guilt and responsibility.

Beauvoir's writing of autobiography as autothanatography engages with, and frequently merges, personal and political contexts, individual and collective experiences. In addition to confrontations with mortality through the portrayal of the deaths and degeneration of others, the narrator's depiction of moments of solitude in private spaces reveals ambiguous responses to self-definition. In a description of a trip to Tunisia, for example, being alone ('ce tête-à-tête avec moi-même') prompts an apprehension of a different status of being in which solitude offers a temporary respite from public life (*FC*, I, p. 88). However, solitude is also associated with death and a death of self in descriptions of nightmares: '[...] la mort, nos morts, la solitude, la vanité; la nuit ils fondent sur moi [...]' (*FC*, I, p. 188). In a different context again, the threat of the death of the self is associated with trips alone to foreign countries, such as Spain, which is transformed into threatening subject, the narrator reduced to a perceived non-existence: '[...] l'Espagne, séparée, étrangère, m'imposait [...] sa présence [...] et moi, sans prise sur ces lieux où mon corps se mouvait, j'avais cessé

[19] It was in the spring of 1937 that Beauvoir had suffered from a serious lung infection, according to the chronology in *Les Écrits de Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. by Francis and Gonthier (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), p. 40.

d'exister' (*FC*, I, p. 41). Finally, moments alone also include references to losing the self through reading (when in China and Russia, for example) and to comparisons between present and past.[20] Indeed, such moments alone seem either to refer back to a *past* self or to move into fictional dimensions. Moments when the self is under threat are explored and these perceived states of non-identity contrast with an existentialist positioning as *pour-soi* subject. Thus, in *La Force des choses*, experiences of war, the ending of relationships, the deaths of close friends, and varied descriptions of the self viewed in isolation, all feed into and shape the narrator's understanding of life and death, self and other.

Beauvoir's Rhetoric of Death: a Discourse of Ageing

Extensive depictions of the writing self as well as the self in writing complicate depictions of the narrator founded on a universal, non gender-specific *pour-soi* positioning. In particular, representations of self within a discourse of ageing necessitate a questioning of the *pour-soi/en-soi* dialectic examined in detail in *La Force de l'âge*: do such 'existentializing' perspectives fit the context of *La Force des choses*, where the narrator confronts herself as ageing woman, with its problematic associations with the position of *en-soi*, yet where she also positions herself as writer? The woman writer appears to be caught in a double-bind, as the *pour-soi* position is a universalizing one, with the opposing *en-soi* carrying negative associations with passivity and the feminine. Some critics identify a denial of the female self in Beauvoir's writing, accusing her of adopting the male gaze, yet also caught as 'victim of her own gaze' when she confronts herself as ageing woman.[21] McPherson even refers to a 'policing away' of the female self in the autobiography:

> [...] any suggestion of gender identification or of gendered ambition and desire is relegated not only to the distant past [...] it is even then policed away by the hasty return to a universal, that is, not female, context in the passages that follow.[22]

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[20] 'Je lus *Le chemin des tourments* d'Alexis Tolstoï, en savourant ma solitude, et le silence' (*FC*, II, p. 83); 'Quel *rajeunissement* de replonger dans la solitude, dans la liberté, comme au temps des voyages à pied' (*FC*, II, p. 183) (my emphasis).

[21] See Okely, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Re-reading*, op. cit., p. 123.

[22] In 'Generic Boundaries Transgressed', *Simone de Beauvoir Studies*, 6 (1989), 5-12 (p. 9).

Is there a place for the woman existentialist autobiographer to express ontological concerns? The narrator refers to herself as superfluous (*FC*, I, p. 36), often writing about Sartre and his views in great detail, even quoting him directly, whilst effectively removing her first-person voice from the narrative. At the same time, she goes to great pains to defend her position with regard to Sartre; she emphasizes the fact that she *chose* him: 'Ce n'est pas un hasard si c'est Sartre que j'ai choisi: car enfin je l'ai choisi' (*FC*, II, p. 491).

If writing offers an obvious means to affirm the self, the long stretches of documentary material with few references to self by the narrator suggest, on the contrary, that she compensates in her text for a perceived *absence* of self. In fact, the narrator describes the process of writing itself as a painful but compulsive activity, as revealed in the following quotation:

> Quand je me sens prête, j'écris d'affilée trois ou quatre cents pages. C'est un labeur pénible: il exige une intense concentration, et le fatras que j'accumule me *dégoûte*. Au bout d'un mois ou deux, je suis trop *ecœurée* pour poursuivre (*FC*, I, p. 372) (my emphasis).
> […]
> Au réveil, *une anxiété* ou *un appétit* m'oblige à prendre tout de suite mon stylo [...]. Mais, sauf en voyage, ou quand il se passe des événements extraordinaires, une journée où je n'écris pas a *un goût de cendres* (*FC*, I, pp. 372-73) (my emphasis).

Self-definition as *être en-soi* with respect to Sartre is, it would seem, offset by the writing act, as was the case in *La Force de l'âge*. Through 'ce métier exigeant' (*FC*, I, p. 27), she describes the attainment of a certain autonomy by adopting the *pour-soi* for herself: 'Je voyais dans mes livres mon véritable accomplissement et ils me dispensaient de toute autre affirmation de moi' (*FC*, I, p. 27). The identity of the writer thus offers a 'force' with which to counter material frustrations. However, statements made in her capacity as writer suggest an element of *mauvaise foi* in the light of theorization in *Le Deuxième sexe* and as far as the impact of gender on publishing practices is concerned. She writes: 'Non; loin de souffrir de ma féminité, j'ai plutôt cumulé, à partir de vingt ans, les avantages des deux sexes; après *L'Invitée* mon entourage me traita à la fois comme *un* écrivain et comme *une* femme

[...]' (*FC*, I, p. 263) (author's emphasis). By appearing to accept the status quo, the narrator does not challenge the fact that the terms 'writer' and 'woman' do not always converge, the fact that the role as writer precedes a *female* identity. However, reflections on these experiences also reveal Beauvoir's negotiations of her identity as a French woman intellectual. She takes up the challenge to respond to the reductive and stereotyped presentations of herself as intellectual in the public sphere, satirizing received ideas that being an intellectual in some way precludes an existence as an embodied female self: 'Souliers plats, chignon tiré, je suis une cheftaine, une dame patronnesse [...]. Je passe mon existence dans les livres et devant ma table de travail, pur cerveau' (*FC*, II, p. 495); '[...] l'essentiel est de me présenter comme une anormale' (*FC*, II, p. 495).

Upon closer analysis, the narrator's statements on writing reveal complex and sometimes contradictory concerns. For example, writing about the past becomes a compulsive act that fills the present, with the desire to write about the self in the private sphere contrasting with a self-imposed directive to 'servir à quelque chose'. Examination of the epilogue and the *intermède*, which has a linking and pause function between the two volumes, is central to understanding the complexities of Beauvoir's positioning in this volume. These metatextual commentaries give the reader the greatest insights into her conception of her writerly self and contrast with the extensive listings of the documentary mode. In these parts of the text, the narrator addresses her readers directly, effectively pre-empting criticisms by drawing attention to the weaknesses of the autobiography herself. She also signals the extent to which the writing process actually occupies the life, a fact hard to convey in the text itself. In contrast to the bulk of the autobiography, few external events are described in these sections. Instead, the narrator turns to personal self-reflection which is not bound to the chronological narrative, and which focuses on the act of writing and the development of the writer, as this example reveals:

> Dans *Les Mandarins* j'ai échoué à montrer combien le travail de mes héros comptait pour eux [...]. Le travail ne se laisse guère décrire: on le fait, c'est tout. Du coup, il tient dans ce livre peu de place, alors que dans ma vie il en occupe tant: elle s'organise tout entier autour (*FC*, I, p. 371).

Such moments of self-revelation, clearly demarcated in the text by virtue of the directness of the style, contrast starkly with the narrator's descriptions of events in which an absence of self characterizes the narration more than any *pour-soi* positioning that presents the life as existentialist model. Such extracts offer glimpses of a 'writerly' subject positioning that emerges in the text and goes beyond a *pour-soi/en-soi* framework.

These metatextual commentaries prove, then, to be particularly revealing. The *intermède*, a crucial hingepoint of the text (*FC*, I, pp. 371-76), anticipates the tone of the epilogue by engaging with questions of death. In these key sections, the narrator undermines the existentialist project by confronting her 'situated self' as embodied, ageing, female self. In this regard, both the *intermède* and epilogue function as markers which highlight the impetus of the autobiography, from life to inevitable death, with the focus on the effect of irreversible physical changes:

> Mais ce qui compte avant tout dans ma vie, c'est que le temps coule; *je vieillis*, le monde change, mon rapport avec lui varie; montrer les transformations, les mûrissements, les *irréversibles dégradations des autres et de moi-même*, rien ne m'importe davantage. Cela m'oblige à suivre docilement le fil des années (*FC*, I, pp. 375-76) (my emphasis).

Writing thus offers a 'solution', if temporary, by offering one means through which to escape the downwards spiral as it is depicted, even if this suggests an inevitable degree of *mauvaise foi*, since the description of the project has evolved from one in which the choice to write is replaced by a perceived obligation to 'suivre docilement le fil des années'.

The key and crucial aspect of the narrator's pursuit of a *pour-soi* identity as writer lies in her fear of 'l'immanence des choses' as death, highlighted by her admission in the epilogue that writing offers the only route out of apprehensions of contingency and nothingness:

> D'où vient, à cinquante-cinq ans, comme à vingt ans, cet extraordinaire pouvoir du Verbe? [...] Sans doute *les mots*, universels, éternels, présence de tous à chacun, sont-ils *le seul transcendant* que je reconnaisse et qui m'émeuve; ils vibrent dans ma bouche et par eux je communie avec

> l'humanité. *Ils arrachent à l'instant et à sa contingence* les larmes, la nuit, *la mort même* et ils les *transfigurent* (*FC*, II, p. 498) (my emphasis).

Writing offers the only solace against the spectre of death. Yet, writing against death shows itself to be unsatisfactory as code for living when the narrator reluctantly confronts her physical being in the world:

> Mais aussitôt quittée ma table de travail, le temps écoulé se rassemble derrière moi. J'ai d'autres choses à penser; brusquement, je me cogne à mon âge. Cette femme ultra-mûre est ma contemporaine: je reconnais ce visage de jeune fille attardé sur une vieille peau (*FC*, II, p. 504).

If writing offers a surrogate youth ('La création est aventure, *elle est jeunesse et liberté*' (*FC*, II, p. 504) (my emphasis)), this cerebral *pour-soi* positioning cannot compensate for the continual reminders of Beauvoir's changing physical self, as suggested in the quotation cited above.

The limitations of this *pour-soi* positioning of self can be developed further by examining the epilogue in more detail. The use of past and present tenses and the abundance of death images reveal how the writerly speaking subject, 'moi', confronts herself as ageing, gendered 'je'. The narrator now aligns herself with the female illness and degeneration which had defined female 'others' in earlier references. This creates a split between her writerly intentions as universal *pour-soi* and actual representations of self which fit neither *pour-soi* nor *en-soi* categories. In being forced to recognize the irreversibility of changes in the physical self, and the absence of any fixed 'absolutes', concerns about time passing and the inexorability of death come to the fore. This is revealed in an interview with Jeanson about the text: 'C'est une des choses qui restent, de cet épilogue […] la brisure de ces espèces d'absolus qu'étaient pour moi non pas seulement les instants, mais les périodes mêmes, les époques de ma vie'.[23] In this regard, the 'existentializing' framework of the book is undermined when the narrator describes herself both as helpless 'agent' in the face of attacks in France and, in a more intimate context,

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[23] *Simone de Beauvoir ou l'entreprise de vivre*, op. cit., p. 290.

in the ways in which she articulates a sense of alienation and isolation, as the following quotation reveals:

> J'assistais, impuissante, au jeu de forces étrangères: l'histoire, le temps, la mort. Cette fatalité ne me laissait même plus la consolation de pleurer. Regrets, révoltes, je les avais épuisés, j'étais vaincue, je lâchais prise. Hostile à cette société à laquelle j'appartenais, bannie par l'âge, de l'avenir, dépouillée fibre par fibre du passé, je me réduisais à ma présence nue. Quelle glace! (*FC*, II, p. 415).

The narrator discusses her changing self-image and draws attention to the preoccupations that ageing brings. She articulates clearly the difficulties for the older woman who perceives no apparent intellectual degeneration, but who is shocked by confrontations with an ageing self:

> Un jour, je me suis dit: 'J'ai quarante ans!' Quand je me suis réveillée de cet étonnement, j'en avais cinquante. La stupeur qui me saisit alors ne s'est pas dissipée. [...] Quand je lis imprimé: Simone de Beauvoir, on me parle d'une jeune femme qui est moi. Souvent quand je dors je rêve que j'ai en rêve cinquante-quatre ans, que j'ouvre les yeux, et que j'en ai trente: 'Quel affreux cauchemar j'ai fait!' se dit la jeune femme faussement réveillée (*FC*, II, p. 505).

In these extracts the physical, more than the psychological, effects of ageing preoccupy the author. The narrative voice emerging here is differentiated from Beauvoir's speaking self by being wholly centred on the body, supposed site of the *en-soi*. Is this a physical incarnation of *immanence* or an entirely different positioning of self? Like Duras's narrator in *L'Amant*, the narrator in *La Force des choses* confronts her reflection as older woman ('[...] *Je déteste mon image:* au-dessus des yeux, la casquette, les poches en dessous, la face trop pleine, et cet air de tristesse autour de la bouche que donnent les rides' (*FC*, II, p. 506)), but also superimposes on it the memory of her younger self: 'Mais moi je vois *mon ancienne tête* où une vérole s'est mise dont je ne guérirai pas' (*FC*, II, p. 506) (my emphasis).[24] The contemplation

[24] 'Très vite dans ma vie il a été trop tard. [...] Entre dix-huit ans et vingt-cinq ans mon visage est parti dans une direction imprévue. A dix-huit ans j'ai vieilli'; 'Ce vieillissement a été brutal. Je l'ai vu gagner mes traits un à un, changer le rapport qu'il y avait entre eux [...]'; 'J'ai un visage lacéré de rides sèches et profondes, à la peau

of a *physical* self here is all the more surprising given the narrator's earlier attempts to erase a narrative of embodiment, especially in a sexual context. As Woodward observed: '[...] we find next to nothing about her sexual life [...]. In short, it would seem that changes in the body in general arouse in her a deep-seated dislike of what is, for her, a sign of transformation as well as the thing itself'.[25]

Confrontations with the ageing process form part of the narrator's first explicit contemplation of her own death in the work. A key passage quoted below expresses the various rhetorical devices in the text which underline an increasing sense of frustration and desperation. The inescapable presence of 'je' as ageing self aligned with 'les choses' is pronounced unequivocally – 'je suis là et les choses sont là' – as if the narrator herself had been turned into an object. The repetition of images underlining a sense of loss rise into a crescendo of 'jamais plus' (*FC*, II, p. 506).[26] The verbs, which denote loss, degeneration and intransigence, represent an overriding disappointment with what is being denied her now, as she mourns the loss of her younger self:

> *J'ai perdu* ce pouvoir que j'avais de séparer les ténèbres de la lumière, me ménageant, *au prix de* quelques tornades, des ciels radieux. Mes révoltes sont *découragées* par l'imminence de ma fin et *la fatalité des dégradations*; mais aussi mes bonheurs ont pâli. La mort n'est plus dans les lointains une aventure brutale; elle hante mon sommeil; éveillée, je sens *son ombre* entre le monde et moi: elle a déjà commencé. [...] ça commence tôt et *ça ronge*. Peut-être s'achèvera-t-elle sans beaucoup de douleur, toute *chose* m'ayant quittée, si bien que cette *présence* à laquelle je ne voulais pas renoncer, la mienne, *ne sera plus* présence à rien, *ne sera plus rien* et se laissera balayer avec indifférence (*FC*, II, p. 506) (my emphasis).
> [...]

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cassée. Il ne s'est pas affaissé comme certains visages à traits fins, il a gardé les mêmes contours mais sa matière est détruite. J'ai un visage détruit', *L'Amant* (Paris: Minuit, 1984), pp. 9-10.

[25] 'Simone de Beauvoir: Ageing and its Discontents', in *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, ed. by S. Benstock (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), pp. 90-114 (p. 95).

[26] 'Jamais plus' is also used in response to her separation with Algren near the end of Part one (*FC*, I, pp. 347-48).

> Oui, le moment est arrivé de dire: *jamais plus*! Ce n'est pas moi qui me détache de mes anciens bonheurs, ce sont eux qui se détachent de moi: les chemins de montagne *se refusent à mes pieds*. *Jamais plus* je ne m'écroulerai, grisée de fatigue, dans l'odeur du foin; *jamais plus* je ne glisserai solitaire sur la neige des matins. *Jamais plus* un homme. Maintenant, autant que mon corps mon imagination en a pris son parti. Malgré tout, c'est étrange de *n'être plus un corps*; il y a des moments où cette bizarrerie, par son caractère définitif, *me glace le sang*. Ce qui me navre, bien plus que ces privations, c'est de ne plus rencontrer en moi de désirs neufs: ils *se flétrissent* avant de naître dans ce temps raréfié qui est désormais le mien (*FC*, II, pp. 506-7) (my emphasis).

Here, the depiction of the irreversibility of the ageing process contrasts with the persona of the writer free to commence a new work at any moment. The narrator's depiction of a politicized self engaging in the world through writing thus appears throughout to offset to some extent this reality of a present self-towards-death.

Moi believed that Beauvoir dealt with loss in her life by using the themes of death and ageing as vehicles behind which to hide, with discussions on old age and death used as a 'strategy of displacement' to block closer inspection of fear of emptiness and loss of love.[27] The ways in which the narrator interlinks images of death, displacement and loss of others certainly merit closer investigation. In *La Force des choses* the images of death which abound in the numerous *déplacements* reveal a melancholic recreation of past selves and revisiting of events. These contrast with the earlier quest narratives which had directed themselves to the future, and are often futile exercizes in her search for fulfilment. There is nostalgia about her younger days and a vocabulary of desperation and death accumulates when the narrator stops to contemplate her future. Furthermore, images of time accelerating in an uncontrollable manner and the positioning of herself beyond an imaginary line that cannot be crossed underline confrontations with ageing and mortality.[28] Ageing becomes

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[27] In *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 242. On this 'blockage of affect', she refers to Winnicott's theories on the fear of emptiness, and search for 'personal non-existence' (pp. 228-29).

[28] See, for example, '[...] les heures trop courtes me mènent à bride abattue vers ma tombe' (*FC*, II, p. 507); 'les aiguilles d'une montre se mettent à galoper, mues non plus par un mécanisme, mais *par un désordre organique caché et affreux* [...]' (*FC*, II,

principal *leitmotif* in the text, viewed as physical manifestation of the irreversibility of certain aspects of life.[29] If, as Ozouf has noted, relationships offer a temporary solace against ageing, the ending of relationships is likewise compounded in the text by the apprehension of an ageing self: '[…] la sérérenité des adieux me rendit à ma vraie condition: j'étais vieille' (*FC*, II, p. 310).[30]

The depiction of the narrator's later relationship with Lanzmann is described as having a rejuvenating effect. Yet, retold with hindsight, it offers a further means of demonstrating the gulf between past and present. On numerous occasions the narrator attributes to herself a different 'age' and claims no longer to recognize her younger self or the world in which she lives: 'Je me sens un peu par-delà, comme dans une seconde vie; je ne reconnais plus bien ni moi, ni le monde d'avant' (*FC*, I, p. 80). Similarly, the description in the diary section of chapter two of the sight of a young girl on a train is used to mirror the narrator's younger self; this has the effect of reinforcing the distance between the self described in earlier volumes and the writing self of *La Force des choses*:

> Nous sommes seuls dans le compartiment avec une petite jeune fille brune [...] elle dort assise. Moi je m'étends et je dors assez bien. Je me rappelle un voyage en Limousin, quand j'avais treize ou quatorze ans, et que j'avais passé toute la nuit le visage à la fenêtre [...]. C'est à des choses comme ça que je sens que j'ai vieilli (*FC*, I, p. 126).

Whereas Beauvoir as writerly *pour-soi* offered the writing project as defence against death, here we find that the oscillating narrative voices

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p. 503) (my emphasis); '[…] j'avais une douleur au cœur à me rappeler combien j'avais été vivante, et le monde, nouveau. En cet instant pourtant, je me sentais heureuse: mais de l'autre côté d'une ligne que je ne retraverserais jamais plus' (*FC*, II, p. 308).

[29] Woodward noted that *La Force des choses* 'closed on the despairing note of old age. Indeed the entire book is a chronicle of the crises of aging that she experienced between the ages of thirty-five and forty-five', in 'Simone de Beauvoir: Aging and its Discontents', op. cit., p. 92.

[30] Ozouf writes: 'Annonçant périodiquement qu'elle était reléguée au pays des ombres. Toujours rebondissante, pourtant, dès que surgissait le nouvel amour. Algren, Lanzmann sont d'abord cela pour elle: un appareillage à neuf dans le vent matinal. L'amour nouveau est la délivrance de l'âge', in *Les Mots des femmes* (Paris: Fayard, 1995), p. 318.

within the text reveal further thanatographical concerns which defy the earlier optimistic belief that cerebral pursuits can blot out material, physical realities. The recreation of past events and the retreat from involvement in the world contrast with a drive to transcend oneself as self-in-the-world. The narrator's aligning of self with 'les jeunes' offers a further possible escape from the territory enclosing the aged and described as an imprisonment. Yet even within such escapes there is an awareness of their ultimate failure as the narrator sees herself now through the eyes of others:

> Les jeunes, ce sont de futurs adultes, mais je m'intéresse à eux; l'avenir est dans leurs mains et si dans leurs projets je reconnais les miens, il me semble que *ma vie se prolonge par-delà ma tombe*. Je me plais en leur compagnie; cependant le réconfort qu'ils m'apportent est douteux: perpétuant ce monde, *ils me le volent* (*FC*, II, p. 503) (my emphasis).
> [...]
> Quelle supériorité d'être vivant! [...] Dans ces yeux de vingt ans, *je me vois déjà morte* et empaillée. Qui vois-je? Vieillir c'est se définir et se réduire. Je me suis débattue contre les étiquettes; mais je n'ai pas pu empêcher les années de *m'emprisonner*' (*FC*, II, pp. 503-4) (my emphasis).
> [...]
> J'ai vécu tendue vers l'avenir et maintenant, je me récapitule, *au passé*: on dirait que *le présent a été escamoté*. J'ai pensé pendant des années que mon œuvre était devant moi, et voilà qu'elle est derrière: à aucun moment elle n'a eu lieu (*FC*, II, p. 504) (my emphasis).

From the detailed analysis of the text in this section, I would argue that the increasing emphasis on ageing and death, in its manifest forms, suggests not only a 'strategy of displacement', as Moi argues, but also reveals connections between the author's autothanatographical motivations to write and the diversity of the narrative voices and stylistic modes that can be traced in the text. Thus the narrator writes about her female self in contrast with the universal *pour-soi* and uses different narrative voices to convey past and present selves. The effect is that the *pour-soi* universal writer position as defence against death is set up but undermined by the narratives on ageing and death, and by references to the passage of time: '[...] la force indocile et mystérieuse c'était celle du temps, des choses, elle dévastait mon corps [...] elle mutilait, elle menaçait de radical anéantissement mon passé, ma vie, tout ce que j'étais' (*FC*, II, pp.

411-12). It is above all *la force intellectuelle* which is not questioned within the narrative of degeneration and death. As a result, we find evidence of a *moi à l'universel*, but also a *je au féminin*. The concluding 'floueé' reference at the end of *La Force des choses* could be viewed in terms of Beauvoir's dissatisfaction regarding her changing self and would seem to encapsulate a sense of frustration with limiting definitions and binary models of existence. It could also be considered within the context of the older narrator's self-critique, as a pre-emptive measure to chastize her own naivety and early apoliticism. The conflicting concerns which arise between the narrator's negotiations of a 'politics of self' and the emergence of a discourse of ageing and death will now be explored further in the context of genre play in *La Force des choses*.

Genres as *forcés*

The blurring of genres within the autobiographical enterprise, highlighted in the previous chapter, is also evident in *La Force des choses*. Here, the use of different genres contributes not only to a writing against death, but also to representations of death in the writing. In particular, the inclusion of a documentary style during the post-war period in this volume mirrors the use of the travelogue in *La Force de l'âge*. In terms of style, both the documentary and the diary mode have been criticized for their absence of literary qualities in studies of *La Force des choses*. For example, Ellmann commented that 'elegance [...] is eschewed' and Keefe argued that Beauvoir 'was unable to distance herself from events in order to select, filter and shape her material […]'.[31] Moreover, a conflict of interest seems to be played out in the text: long, documentary sections and diary extracts contrast with the narrator's self-expression in the *intermède* and epilogue, the latter, as mentioned earlier, often focusing on the writing act itself. Tenses oscillate between a present reality, which is encapsulated in the diary, and frequent depictions of escape into the past.

Beauvoir's position as public figure undoubtedly influences the writing of this volume. Within the documentary mode the narrator includes descriptions of her numerous trips to destinations such as

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[31] In 'The Dutiful Simone de Beauvoir', in *Commentary*, 40, 2 (August 1965), 59-62 (p. 60), and *Simone de Beauvoir: A Study of Her Writings*, op. cit., p. 40, respectively.

Helsinki, the USSR, Poland, China, South America and North Africa. As companion to Sartre, the writing documents their political experiences, with the underlying themes of decolonization and the exploration of alternatives to capitalist regimes serving to unify their standpoints through the text. Thus, a *moi public* combines with a joint political stance articulated through the first-person plural 'nous'. As a result, the journalistic style of the documentary sections complicates definitions of autobiography, the genre bringing *mémoires* into a public and political forum. The 'social critic's' distanced observations contrast with the narrator in the autobiographical situation and destabilize the notion of authority in this hybrid text to the extent that a collective political discourse dominates the narrative, leaving few spaces for the autobiographical 'je'. The act of writing the self in this period of new-found freedom is, paradoxically, overtaken by a writing that seems to encapsulate the state of immanence itself: the bulk and randomness of the narrative suggest that the contingent aspects of life are being recorded not by choice, but rather by a compulsion to commit to paper the details of an existence. If Beauvoir fails to write herself against death in this volume, but rather, implicates her first person 'je' voice *in* death, can we call *La Force des choses* autobiography?

The diary extracts certainly bring the focus back to the personal and the use of the present tense and references to 'présence' provide a striking contrast to the documentary-style narrative written predominantly in the past tense. Yet within these sections of the text, the *journal intime* becomes increasingly journalistic; the fragmented nature of the diary extracts, which interrupt the linear chronology documenting the past, suggest a frustration with the writing project and represent an alternative mode of expression that contrasts with the process of selection and ordering of events employed in the autobiographical account. Thus the speaking self is paradoxically absent from the text, leaving a mass of contingent details to fill up the page. In addition, the moments when the diary genre interrupts the narrative tend to signal moments of crisis. In the first volume, Beauvoir's concerns about Sartre's health (*FC*, I, pp. 100-2), and the relationship he has established with the enigmatic 'M', appear to hinder the writer's wider writing projects, suggesting that the diary mode functions as recompense: 'En voici des extraits; ils livrent ce que ma mémoire échoue à ressusciter: la poussière quotidienne de ma

vie' (*FC*, I, p. 102). Thus the genre functions as surrogate form of autobiography in which the self is overshadowed by the events being described and where the role of observer is more dominant than that of observed.

Furthermore, confrontations with a less optimistic reality in the *journal intime* are revealed through references to despondency and death. In the second volume, for example, the referendum that brings de Gaulle to power is described as 'un énorme suicide collectif' (*FC*, II, p. 230). Such political upheavals also mirror more personal preoccupations: 'Je ne travaillais plus. [...] Mon oisiveté et l'anxiété générale m'amenèrent, comme en septembre 1940, à me remettre à mon journal' (*FC*, II, pp. 152-53). The narrator writes in the diary that she is unable to work, and that the act of writing helps to kill time ('tuer le temps' (*FC*, II, p. 157)). The 'journal de la défaite', I would argue, refers not only to the political situation in France (notably the narrator's concerns about Algeria) but to her own frustration with the autobiographical enterprise, and her restrictive situation.

In addition to the diary genre, the travelogue, whose function was explored in detail in the previous chapter on *La Force de l'âge*, reveals further conflicts of interest in the writing up of the self. The detailed description of a trip to Brazil (*FC*, II, pp. 310-97), for example, raises questions about the parameters of autobiography.[32] The narrator undermines her own text by inviting the reader to skip over the description of this trip if so desired: '[…] ceux que ce reportage ennuiera pourront toujours le sauter' (*FC*, II, p. 311).[33] This suggests not only a self-deprecating tendency but also the narrator's doubts about the autobiographical relevance of these lengthy sections in which the first-person voice is muted. In this regard, form is as revealing as content since the cumulative style of the narrative betrays a compulsion to write. The Brazil narrative acts as palimpsest, insofar as it represents a fresh attempt by the narrator to fill the text with new experiences and possibilities, rather than dwell on death and ageing.

[32] It is similar to Beauvoir's narrative on the United States in *L'Amérique au jour le jour* (1954), and on China in *La Longue marche, essai sur la Chine* (1957).

[33] Beauvoir also downplays the interest of the autobiographies in a letter to Algren written in the autumn of 1962: 'Le dernier volume de mes mémoires sera *beaucoup* plus long que le précédent, n'essayez même pas de le lire', *Lettres à Nelson Algren: Un Amour transatlantique, 1947-1964,* op. cit., p. 602.

There is a relative absence of self-revelation; instead, descriptions presented in a more objective and disengaged style and recounted largely from the first-person plural perspective tend to dominate. When references to the self do emerge they are often accompanied by images of illness and death (with one short exception when the narrator describes a lecture she delivers on the situation of women (*FC*, II, p. 353)).[34] In addition, the inclusion of comments on the unsuccessful aspects of the trip undermines the travelogue as quest mode examined in the previous chapter, and further, suggests the impossibility of recovering any Eldorado:

> Je me traînai à travers les lugubres marchés des lugubres villages dont elle voulait nous montrer la misère. Pendant deux mois j'avais aimé le Brésil; je l'aime à travers mes souvenirs: mais à ce moment-là, soudain, j'en ai eu assez à crier de la sécheresse, de la faim, de toute cette détresse (*FC*, II, p. 386).

Visits to other countries, such as Cuba, become figurative counterpoints to Paris, and Brazil contrasts with the America of Algren; not only does Beauvoir visit this 'other' America with Sartre, but she also draws the Eastern bloc (their visits to the USSR and China, for example) into their sphere of influence. It could be argued that the author pushes political documentary and the travelogue to the limits of what is understood to be 'autobiography' and, in the process, brings into question the usefulness of auto*bio*graphical definitions.[35]

The perpetual movement in this volume creates an uneven, fragmented prose style which ranges from the lyrical to the very factual. The dense, solid blocks of narrative exemplify 'les choses', or

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[34] See, for example, the narrator's description of falling ill with typhoid, and the 'goût infernal' which overshadows her days (*FC*, II, p. 386).

[35] Beauvoir was aware of the effect of her chosen genre styles in the autobiography. Indeed, the contingent nature of the autobiographical account is contrasted with the novel in comments made on the writing act itself: 'Mais je regrettais que le roman échouât toujours à en rendre la contingence [...]. Dans une autobiographie au contraire, les événements se présentent dans leur gratuité, leurs hasards, leurs combinaisons parfois saugrenues, tels qu'ils ont été [...] comment *les choses* arrivent pour de bon aux hommes. Le danger, c'est qu'à travers cette capricieuse profusion, le lecteur ne distingue aucune image claire, seulement un fatras' (*FC*, II, p. 296) (my emphasis).

what I have named 'death writing', as they seem to exemplify the state of immanence itself. They are now mapped within wider spatial and temporal dimensions, stretching beyond the confines of France and the present-tense political documentary of the time. Conversely, the comparatively few non-descriptive, non-chronological sections which slow the pace of the narrative (and in which the inscription of the first-person as writerly self contrasts with an effacement of self in the documentary or diary sections) might be classed the most autobiographical sections of the text. The question is whether material such as documentary, as employed in this work, is extraneous to autobiography, or constitutes an important stretching of the limits of the genre.

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La Force des choses is a rawer, less stylized, and more fragmented text than *La Force de l'âge*, conveying in large part the contingency of life itself. In its multifarious forms death appears as ageing, stagnation and repetition in the 'death' writing itself, and in the symbolic deaths of friendships, relationships and regimes. The predominant absence of the traditionally understood first-person voice of the autobiographical self in this text is striking: the multiple 'je' voices, past and present, are harder to trace in the midst of an increasing number of 'nous' voices and third-person objectified commentary which concentrate on politics and public events. The female 'je' survives often as a reflection of a feared, ageing self. This bleaker text, which reflects Beauvoir's personal and political crises, expresses more a lamentation of death than a defence against it, despite the juxtapositions of writing as escape from material and physical disappointments. The experiences of the Algerian war prompt a reassessment of the narrator's national and political affiliations, but also her personal politics. The ways in which she describes the disintegration of various identities (whether national, political, or personal) and her *prise de conscience* constitute an important stage of her re-evaluation of herself through the autobiographical genre and anticipate subsequent turning points and retrospective re-evaluations and representations.

The disappointments enunciated at the end of the work indicate an admission of the limitations of the existentialist framework. 'Existentializing' the self as *être pour-soi* writerly self

becomes increasingly compromised, whether in the political sphere or as regards the narrator's physical and emotional bearing on the world. For example, 'existentializing' against death and immanence is betrayed by explorations of the nature of immanence itself. The narrator's search for a space in which to articulate a female voice is revealed by the fragmented *dis*ordered nature of the text and these narratives problematize existentialism 'in the feminine'. Depictions of the ageing process are associated with a gendered female identity whose norms are dictated in many ways by society and internalized by the narrator, and which contrast with the framework of universal *pour-soi* versus *en-soi*. The explicitly described romanticized past selves and ageing Beauvoirian self thus appear to clash with the dichotomous thinking of existentialism.

The writing act, however, offers a defence against death. It presents the opportunity for the author to assume a gendered *pour-soi* position which guarantees her own integrity, both as writer and woman. Yet it originates from the anguish of all that can never be re-experienced. Discussions of the writing of the autobiography as compulsive activity and the fragmented style of the text draw attention to the ongoing crises in the narrator's drive to represent her past and present selves. The compelling unfolding in *La Force des choses* of the life as 'flouée', especially in the *intermède* and epilogue, overshadows narratives characterized by depictions of freedom and success. A pessimism and sense of failure is conveyed by the older narrator re-evaluating personal and public events, such as the Algerian war and the ending of personal relationships. Existentialist frameworks are shaken by the conflicts arising from competing concerns. *La Force des choses* as autothanatography now expresses the narrator's sense of despair when confronted with inescapable realities concerning her own ageing self-towards-death, and regarding the difficulties in expressing *herself* within the conventional autobiographical project. The search for a writing strategy to deal with these competing concerns shall now be explored in the following chapter on *Tout compte fait*.

CHAPTER IV

Tout compte fait

Tout compte fait, the fourth volume of Beauvoir's autobiographical *œuvre*, would seem to serve as final word on her autobiographical writings, as the author reviews her whole life, writing about the years covered in the earlier volumes but this time using a broadly thematic rather than a chronological framework. Indeed, in this volume the author affirms: 'Aujourd'hui ma vie est faite, mon œuvre est faite' *(TCF,* p. 193). Published in 1972, the text poses several challenges to the reader since, if the previous three volumes have been read, certain expectations and assumptions inevitably influence the reading process.[1]

The decision to go back over ground covered in the earlier volumes has puzzled critics, who question the place of this volume within the traditional parameters of the genre. Keefe has argued that, '[I]nsofar as autobiography, as Lejeune has argued, is essentially about the formation of a personality, this may go a long way towards explaining why *Tout compte fait* is a very unsatisfactory work of autobiography'.[2] Where Domenach insists on its classification as 'compte' in the sense of a 'compte rendu',[3] Moi describes it as 'a lifeless ghost of an autobiography, a mere chronicle of official duties, rather than an exploration of lived experience'.[4] Other critics have placed the volume under the aegis of feminist autobiography by placing emphasis on the entry of Sylvie Le Bon into the text, and by drawing attention to the feminist stance Beauvoir adopts at the end of

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[1] Gennari interprets this volume as a 'final' say: 'Double mouvement, qui aboutit au bilan de tous les comptes séparés, et les *boucle*, d'un grand trait', *Nouvelles littéraires*, 18-24 September 1972, p. 3.

[2] 'Simone de Beauvoir's Second Look at Her Life', *Romance Studies,* 8 (Summer 1986), 41-55 (p. 54).

[3] 'Simone de Beauvoir: *Tout compte fait', Esprit,* 418 (December 1972), 979-80 (p. 979).

[4] *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 251.

the volume.[5] Yet such attempts to classify the volume would seem to limit readings of the text by focusing specifically on the codification of her engagement with feminism. Although this undoubtedly informs an important strand of the text, I will suggest here that *Tout compte fait* merits further attention as far as the autobiographical *act* itself is concerned.

As became evident in *La Force des choses*, the influence of an increasingly public persona plays an important role in the structuring of the text. When the fourth volume appeared in France, it was reviewed fairly widely in the press. This is not surprising for several reasons: Simone de Beauvoir was not only well-known as a writer and Goncourt Prize winner, but she had also established a public profile beside Sartre as political activist in their numerous trips abroad and participation in events at home. Furthermore, she had publically espoused the feminist cause in the early 1970s, participating, for example, in the demonstration with the *Mouvement de Libération des femmes* (*MLF*) in favour of abortion in November 1971. She also helped to found the group 'Choisir' in 1972, a group which fought for the legalization of contraception and abortion.[6] My aim in this chapter is to explore the effects of this increasingly public profile on the way in which *Tout compte fait* is presented.

The title of this volume would appear to suggest that this is the author's final word.[7] In this rewriting and reconstruction of a life, how does the autobiographer solve the problem of concluding? Unlike the previous volume *La Force des choses,* where the portrayal of an

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[5] For example, Evans comments: '[...] de Beauvoir codified her increasing engagement with feminism through the means of her writing. The particular vehicle for this codification [...] was *All Said and Done* [...]', in *Simone de Beauvoir* (London: Sage, 1996), p. 73. Similarly, Simons summarized *Tout compte fait* in terms of Beauvoir's 'involvement in the French women's liberation movement and the beginning of her relationship with Sylvie Le Bon […]', in her introduction to *Feminist Interpretations of Simone de Beauvoir,* ed. by M. Simons (Pennsylvania: Penn State UP, 1995), pp. 1-28 (p. 5).

[6] Monteil describes Beauvoir's activities at this time in *Simone de Beauvoir, le mouvement des femmes: mémoires d'une jeune fille rebelle* (Quebec: Stanke, 1995).

[7] Keefe remarked that the rewriting 'may make us take aspects of her earlier volumes less literally and perhaps less seriously. [...] we as readers may never again be able to see them in the original, naive way', in 'Simone de Beauvoir's Second Look at Her Life', *Romance Studies*, 8 (Summer 1986), 41-55 (p. 53).

ageing, physical self culminates in the famous 'flouée' conclusion, the narrator in *Tout compte fait* dispenses with discussion of her embodied self, choosing to focus on her intellectual development, often employing the essay mode of *Le Deuxième sexe* as writing style (in contrast with the exploration of her ageing body in *La Force des choses,* or that of her mother's, explored in *Une mort très douce,* or of Sartre's, revealed in *La Cérémonie des adieux*). I will argue that Beauvoir's self-representation in *Tout compte fait,* first and foremost as intellectual in the public domain, is used to 'tie up the loose ends' of the autobiographical *œuvre* (the disparate narratives and fragmented genres), in a way that conceptualizes the life as complete in a paradoxical positioning of the narrator as *voix d'outre-tombe.*

Since many of the criticisms of the text centre on structural issues, this necessitates a reassessment of the limitations of the genre itself: from the breakdown of auto*bio*graphy can the emergence of auto*thanato*graphy be traced?[8] The first section of this chapter develops the argument set out in *La Force des choses* regarding the narrator's presentation of intersecting public and private identities. In particular, the articulation of Beauvoir's increasingly public role in France, now as activist for the *MLF*, and her use of philosophy and politics as structuring feature of narratives in this volume, inform the discussion. The extent to which the Sartre-Beauvoir relationship continues to dominate the narrative of Beauvoir's life will be examined, and it will be argued that depictions of the author present her not only as his *shadow* (as was the case in *La Force de l'âge* and *La Force des choses*) but also as an intellectual 'twin'.[9] In a similar vein, the function of certain generic strategies used in *La Force de l'âge* and *La Force des choses* and which recur here (the use of the travelogue and political commentary, for instance), will be developed in the analysis of this volume. The fact that other narratives, such as those focusing on relationships with others, are more muted, then

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[8] For example, Keefe argues that Beauvoir 'largely contents herself with catalogues of one kind or another and fairly unsophisticated descriptions of the world around her', in *Simone de Beauvoir: A Study of Her Writings*, op. cit., p. 44. See also MacDonald's research on the structural implications of the use of themes instead of chronology, in 'La Formation d'une chroniqueuse: *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*', *Tangence*, 45 (October 1994), 107-15.

[9] This becomes even more evident in Beauvoir's description of Sartre's physical degeneration in *La Cérémonie des adieux* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981).

brings us to explore the depiction and function of the private sphere in this work. In this regard, the significance of representations of childhood within the volume proves revealing. I will question why the narratives depicting a gendered self suggest greater ambiguities now than in previous volumes, and why the structure and style of the volume tend to mask, rather than reveal, certain facets of the narrator's identity.

The author-reader relationship, and questions of gender and genre combine in the analysis focusing on genre in the third section of this chapter. This relationship is particularly valued by Beauvoir, as Deguy notes: 'A l'opposé de Sartre qui déclarait n'avoir "jamais rien appris de [ses] commentateurs", Beauvoir continue d'ailleurs à réserver dans ses textes autobiographiques une place privilégiée à la perspicacité des lecteurs de bonne foi'.[10] In particular, the rhetorical strategies behind the dialogue between projected reader and author will be explored here in order to highlight the important function of the reader as 'legatee'. This includes discussion of the role of Beauvoir herself as 'engaged' *reader* of her own autobiographies, and the implications of this for the writer of *Tout compte fait*.[11] Does the text's ending give the reader the 'freedom' to draw conclusions, as some critics, such as Hewitt, have suggested?[12] Sankovitch's reading suggests that the open-ended conclusion is part of the legacy left for the reader:

> These concluding lines provide a synopsis of the autobiographical pact [...]. On the one hand there is the author [...]. On the other hand, there is the emotionally engaged reader, *ennemi*, or *ami*, in either case, someone who

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[10] 'Simone de Beauvoir: La quête de l'enfance, le désir du récit, les intermittences du sens', *Revue des sciences humaines*, 222 (April-June 1991), 63-101 (p. 97). Whitmarsh has also argued that Beauvoir's insistence on the importance of communicating with others demonstrates that the reader relationship is valued, in *Simone de Beauvoir and the Limits of Commitment* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981), pp. 91-92.

[11] As Ramsay noted in her study of autobiography: 'The writer is also a reader, a reader of his own self-writing', in *The French New Autobiographies: Sarraute, Duras, and Robbe-Grillet* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), p. 11.

[12] Hewitt writes that '[B]y the end of her autobiography, de Beauvoir dispenses with the idea of concluding. She will have delivered the "whole" of her life, but without knowing its meaning', in *Autobiographical Tightropes* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990) p. 51.

> has felt the impact of the *Figura* [...]. Simone de Beauvoir does indeed decline to conclude, reflecting what she had written in the prologue of the same volume, namely, that a conclusion to an autobiography is necessarily premature and partial. The unconcluded life goes on. [...] Simone de Beauvoir gives the last word to the readers who, as legatees, must play their role in the achievement of her autobiographical intention.[13]

It is within this framework that the reader-writer relationship and the notion of *Tout compte fait* as literary *testament* will be examined. Whilst Audet believes that the volume represents the author's resignation in the face of death, this reading suggests that despite the insistence that she is not writing for posterity, there is evidence of an underlying strategy.[14] Critics' appraisal of the autobiography as 'mandat', and as 'lifeless ghost' will be analysed, and the significance of Beauvoir's presentation as intellectual highlighted. My aim is to question why Beauvoir chooses to *re*write the period up to 1962, already covered in the first three volumes, and, furthermore, why the chronological approach is initially supplanted by chapters grouped around broad themes. Within this analysis, the ways in which the narrator draws attention to the work as *final* volume will be analysed.

Beauvoir as Public Persona

The response in the French media to Simone de Beauvoir at the time of publication of *Tout compte fait* supports the argument that her public persona had attracted much attention by this stage in her career. MacDonald refers to a '*personnagification*' that reconciled through writing the public self and the self created in the text: 'Elle s'identifie avec son personnage comme un lecteur s'identifie avec un personnage fictif. Une conséquence, positive pour elle, en est la catharsis de l'écriture autobiographique'.[15] Evans also drew attention to the fact that *La Force des choses* and *Tout compte fait* 'cover de Beauvoir's

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[13] 'Simone de Beauvoir's Autobiographical Legacy', *Simone de Beauvoir Studies*, 8 (1991), 93-101 (p. 100).

[14] Audet argues: 'Il y a donc maintenant chez Simone de Beauvoir une certaine résignation et une surprenante sérénité devant le phénomène de sa mort ou de celle des autres', in *Simone de Beauvoir face à la mort* (Lausanne: L'Age d'homme, 1979), p. 130.

[15] 'La Formation d'une chroniqueuse', op. cit., p. 113.

years as an internationally known woman of letters'.[16] In the autobiography itself, the narrator raises the question of her various public and private personae by voicing indifference to the images that are presented of her by others:

> Dans l'ensemble, je suis assez indifférente aux images qu'on se forme de moi; elles sont si contradictoires et souvent si inconsistantes que je ne m'y attarde pas. Tout de même je suis un peu émue quand j'aborde en chair et en os un public. Je me sens transformée en objet par ces consciences étrangères (*TCF*, p. 58).

At the same time, however, reference is made to a process of objectification.[17] In addition, Beauvoir had expressed in an interview a frustration with the tendency of others to attribute to her an exclusively feminist identity as a result of her increasing celebrity:

> [...] ce que vous appelez ma célébrité, enfin l'attente des gens, m'a gênée. Il y a une certaine exigence que je trouve un peu sotte parce qu'elle m'enfermerait, me figerait complètement dans une espèce de *bloc de béton* féministe (my emphasis).[18]

The absence of freedom in the public eye, which is experienced by the narrator as an objectification, thus problematizes the existentialist project. However, in this reappraisal of her life the narrator is at pains to structure it as existentialist project from the point of view of the public figure: '[...] ma liberté n'a jamais pris la forme d'un *décret*; ç'a été la poursuite d'un projet originel, incessamment repris et fortifié: savoir et exprimer' (*TCF*, p. 25). By then objectifying her life on her terms ('Ma vie: familière et lointaine, elle me définit et je lui suis extérieure. Qu'est-ce au juste que ce bizarre objet?' (*TCF*, p. 12)), she suggests that it is possible to consider it from a distance. This will be shown to have further implications for the writing project.

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[16] *Simone de Beauvoir: A Feminist Mandarin* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1985), p. 101.

[17] The narrator also comments elsewhere: '[...] Je peux bien contester l'écrivain que je suis, mais non m'arracher à sa peau' (*TCF*, p. 286).

[18] *Simone de Beauvoir: un film de Josée Dayan and Malka Ribowska* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), p. 75.

By following a certain number of 'fils conducteurs', the main turning points in Beauvoir's life are presented as a series of chances or choices. The narrator emphasizes certain constants to create a sense of continuity and this offers a means of gaining control over the way in which the life is interpreted, not only by readers in the private sphere, but also by the author's public reader-critics. Indeed, the desire to respond to her readers and critics in *Tout compte fait* is reminiscent of the observations made in *Le Deuxième sexe* which associate women autobiographers, not altogether favourably, with a concern for clarity and the dispelling of myths:

> [...] la femme épuise son courage à dissiper des mirages et elle s'arrête effrayée au seuil de la réalité. C'est pourquoi il y a par exemple des autobiographies féminines qui sont sincères et attachantes: mais aucune ne peut se comparer aux *Confessions*, aux *Souvenirs d'égotisme*. Nous sommes encore trop préoccupées d'y voir clair pour chercher à percer par-delà cette clarté d'autres ténèbres (*DS*, II, p. 635).[19]

In a similar vein, Miller argued that for writers such as Stern, Sand and Beauvoir, 'the determination to have their lives make sense and thus be susceptible to *universal* reception blinds them, as it were, to their own darkness [...]'.[20] In fact, the Beauvoir of *Tout compte fait* now appeals to different audiences: there is her already captured audience who would have read the three earlier volumes and who would therefore be familiar with the material covering these years. There is also the audience who would be drawn to *Tout compte fait* independently of the earlier volumes to read about her experiences within the women's liberation movement.

In *Tout compte fait*, the period already covered in *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* is re-examined through the lens of chance ('le hasard'), and likewise, the years covered in *La Force de l'âge* are re-presented through the lens of freedom ('la liberté'). The latter serves as reminder of the existentialist framework in place, which the older narrator now views more critically; speculations about the role of

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[19] See also *DS*, II, pp. 632-33, for Beauvoir's discussion of the problems facing women writers in patriarchal structures.

[20] 'Women's Autobiography in France: For A Dialectics of Identification', in *Women and Language in Literature and Society*, ed. by S. McConnell-Ginet, R. Borker and N. Furman (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1980), pp. 258-73 (pp. 268-69).

chance regarding her relationship with Sartre, for example, give way to the affirmation that '[S]i c'est en partie le hasard qui nous a mis en présence, l'engagement qui a lié nos vies a été librement choisi […]' (*TCF*, p. 34).[21] The use of the conditional 'si' is counter-balanced by the weight of the terms 'engagement' and 'choisi'. Furthermore, the certainty that her relationship with Sartre was 'l'événement capital de mon existence' (*TCF*, p. 33), is declared unequivocally. Within this structure, elements from the past are downplayed: '[...] bientôt il ne m'est plus resté de mon passé que ma soeur, Stépha et Fernand […]' (*TCF*, p. 34). Jacques, whose key role in the *Mémoires* was highlighted in Chapter one, is no longer considered in the same terms: '[...] il n'a pas joué un grand rôle dans mon enfance' (*TCF*, p. 20). It is the continuity of the life that is emphasized in this work, as the narrator states: 'Si je considère la ligne générale de ma vie, elle me frappe par sa continuité' (*TCF*, p. 44). She focuses predominantly on the role of Sartre in her life and the decision to write, both of which inform the framework for the life that is to be recounted.[22] Within this structure, the rhetoric of death and ageing presented in *La Force des choses* is tempered by the affirmation: '[...] je n'ai pas l'impression d'avoir vieilli' (*TCF*, p. 47). Thus *Tout compte fait* could be viewed as a text that offers an opportunity for the author to counteract the 'flouée' ending of *La Force des choses* and to respond actively to her critics.

This determination to mark out the most significant events to the reader, underlined by the tight structuring of the early chapters, then gives way to a running-documentary style suggestive of the disengaged observer; both modes underline the narrator's desire to present the concrete, material facts of an existence: 'Et je voulais aussi me matérialiser dans des livres qui seraient, comme ceux que j'avais aimés, des choses existant pour autrui mais hantés par une présence: la

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[21] Some examples of existentialist terminology include the following: 'Dans le domaine culturel, il m'était permis de choisir' (*TCF*, p. 38); 'En politique, mes engagements ont toujours exprimé les idées que je m'étais forgées au cours de ma vie: la question c'était de choisir au présent les conduites qui dans des circonstances inédites les traduisaient le plus fidèlement' (*TCF*, p. 39); 'Les amitiés que nous avons nouées vers la fin de la guerre n'ont rien eu de fortuit' (*TCF*, p. 40).

[22] The narrator writes, for example: 'Cependant il y a aussi dans ma vie des liens très anciens qui ne se sont jamais brisés. Deux choses lui confèrent son unité: la place que Sartre n'a pas cessé d'y tenir. Et ma fidélité à mon projet originel: connaître et écrire' (*TCF*, p. 45).

mienne' (*TCF*, p. 45). The verb 'matérialiser' suggests a corporeality which contrasts with the erasure of the autobiographical 'je' within the narrative focusing on the public sphere. Certainly, the listing and documentary modes of writing had already been present in *La Force de l'âge* and *La Force des choses*, but they are pushed to the extremes of what could be called autobiography in *Tout compte fait* by the fact that the narratorial 'je' becomes more remote and displaced in such sections.

In this regard, it could be argued that Merleau-Ponty's theory of the 'situated self, which was familiar to Beauvoir, underlines some of the competing narratives in *Tout compte fait*.[23] In his work, as Matthews summarizes below, he privileges the concept of being-in-the-world in order to underline the links between the *embodied* individual and the environment:

> We see objects as having a meaning for us because they are related to our actions, and so to our bodies' capacities for action [...]. The world that we perceive is thus neither purely 'objective' – completely independent in its character of our perception of it – nor purely 'subjective' – given its character by our minds. We who perceive it are, equally, not disembodied pure egos, as Descartes would have it, but consciousnesses which are necessarily involved in the external world, and so essentially embodied.[24]

In *Tout compte fait*, this theory offers a rationale for the focus on external events, supported by the narrator's justification: '[...] ma vie a été en même temps le produit et l'expression du monde dans lequel elle se déroulait, et c'est pourquoi j'ai pu, en la racontant, parler de tout autre chose que de moi' (*TCF*, p. 47). Theoretically, it offers the ideal mode of self-expression for the *embodied* subject to explore the relationship between self and the world.[25] This is highlighted, for

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[23] She had referred to his *Phénoménologie de la perception* in *Le Deuxième sexe*.

[24] *Twentieth-Century Philosophy* (Oxford: Opus, 1996), p. 91.

[25] Kruks has differentiated between Beauvoir and Sartre's interpretation of existentialism, arguing that Beauvoir stressed 'situatedness' in her analysis of subjectivity, in Pilardi, 'Feminists read *The Second Sex*', in *Feminist Interpretations of Simone de Beauvoir*, op. cit., pp. 29-43 (p. 32). See also her study, *Retrieving Experience: Subjectivity and Recognition in Feminist Politics* (Cornell, Cornell UP, 2001).

example, when the narrator explains that the *projet originel*, which is 'connaître et écrire', consists of bringing *en-soi* and *pour-soi* together:

> Qu'ai-je visé à travers lui? Comme tout existant, j'ai cherché à *rejoindre mon être* et pour cela je me suis inspirée d'expériences où j'avais l'illusion d'y avoir accédé. [...] il me semblait réaliser l'impossible liaison de l'en soi et du pour soi lorsque je me perdais dans l'objet que je regardais [...] (*TCF*, p. 45) (my emphasis).

However, the model of the situated self, like the Sartrean *en-soi/pour-soi* positionings, is overshadowed in the text by a distanced narrator who observes and relates events from afar, and whose attempts to translate individual experiences into universal ones are less convincing.[26] For example, although the narrator refers to the 'travail en commun' of the grouping of intellectuals and writers who participate in the *Temps modernes* publication, or take part in the Russell Tribunal (*TCF*, p. 54), the description of involvement in a joint project is also used to provide a point of contrast with the narrator's own positioning – 'Ce travail en commun, quotidien, assidu, loin de ma propre vie, m'avait donné l'impression de faire une retraite; et aussi je m'étais sentie totalement mobilisée: pas un flottement, pas un moment perdu' (*TCF*, p. 480). The depiction of the student demonstrations in France is also revealing (*TCF*, p. 581)), as are comments made by the narrator about her situation: she is caught between a rejection of her origins, and acceptance of the fact that, as she had noted, '[M]on histoire était typiquement celle d'une jeune bourgeoise française de famille pauvre' (*TCF*, p. 32). The competing demands of the autobiographical enterprise are revealed through these various negotiations of the singular and the universal. More specifically on the subject of the autobiography, the narrator of *Tout compte fait* had written that she was less interested in her self-representation than in making sense of her place in the world: 'Construire une image de moi-même: cette vaine et d'ailleurs impossible entreprise ne m'intéresse pas. Ce que je souhaiterais c'est me faire une idée de ma situation dans le monde' (*TCF*, p. 58) (my emphasis). In practice, the presentation of an embodied, 'situated self'

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[26] This wider survey of the world contrasts with the narrower scope of *La Force de l'âge*.

in the text is more muted than in previous volumes; it is overshadowed by a more polemical and more distanced, essay-like narrative stance.

Why might this be so? In many of the documentary-style sections of the text the writing has a flat style which expresses the very state of contingency itself. As the narratives of *La Force des choses* had also revealed, discussion of subjects such as genocide combine with tourist travelogues and summaries of important political events of the day, especially in chapters six and seven when world events take centre stage.[27] Thus hybrid narratives emerge, not only in terms of content, but also through the deployment of alternating narrative voices. When trips are described, the narrator makes a point of combining the 'je' and the 'nous' voices: 'Dans les pages suivantes je dis indifférement *je* ou *nous*; mais en effet, sauf pendant de brefs moments, j'étais toujours accompagnée' (*TCF*, p. 294). This reveals moments when her identity is blurred with Sartre's, and, as in *La Force de l'âge* and *La Force des choses*, the narrator often plays down any direct involvement she might have had with the various conferences and lectures which they attended by presenting herself in the shadow of Sartre.

This also extends to other domains: within the sphere of *MLF* activities, and as supporter of workers' rights, the narrator speaks primarily through the voice of the 'public figure'. Case studies, references to other researchers, footnotes and diagrams all reinforce the detached style of description. Indeed, the narrative is reminiscent of the third-person essay mode of *Le Deuxième sexe*. In addition, Beauvoir's role as polemicist appears in her discussions about teaching and politics; as critic, she takes on the books and films of others but she is also most strongly a critic of her own works.[28]

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[27] In chapter five Beauvoir also describes a trip to Japan with Sartre. Intertwined with social history are references to their wariness about indigenous customs and food.

[28] See, for example, her forceful outburst on teaching (*TCF*, pp. 287-89), and the academic style of her introduction to world politics (*TCF*, p. 555-56). Also included in the autobiography are responses to criticisms of *Le Deuxième sexe*, notably by Suzanne Lilar, who had published *Le Malentendu du Deuxième sexe* in 1969 (*TCF*, p. 614). For articles on the debate, see *Les Écrits de Simone de Beauvoir,* ed. by Francis and Gontier (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), p. 85.

It seems, then, that it is as essayist, rather than as autobiographer, that Beauvoir presents her strongest case, as this is where the woman writer and intellectual meet head on. This influence can be traced in the diverse writing styles and inclusion of material normally found in genres other than autobiography, and has the effect that many of the descriptions are written from an objective, impersonal stance. In this regard, the portrayal of others, with some exceptions to be considered in due course, can appear functional. The fate of female friends reads more as salutory warning than empathetic portrayal, the macabre portrait of Lise as ageing woman being one such example. This is underlined by the author's avowed need to place herself at a distance from the friends she describes, as she writes: '[...] il me faudrait d'abord prendre à leur égard *un recul* qui me permettrait de les voir' (*TCF*, p. 55) (my emphasis). Thus a distancing from their gradual degeneration downplays any identification of the narrator with them.

Likewise, the portrayal of her mother's death in *Tout compte fait* is very different from the moving account in *Une mort très douce*. In *Tout compte fait* the mother's voice is absent and the reassessment of the mother-daughter relationship is muted; it is the more formal voice of the researcher who carefully analyses the subject matter which dominates.[29] To this example could be added her portrayal of Giacometti's death, in which the ethical issue of whether cancer victims should be informed of their condition, and the emphasis on the artist's historical legacy, are the focus (*TCF*, pp. 122-23).[30] Beauvoir, in recognizing her strengths as essayist, privileges this genre in a way that distances the personal, and this tends to place her ethics and aesthetic within these essay-like parameters.

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[29] Woodward commented on the writing of the mother's death as follows: 'When Beauvoir refers to her mother's death in her memoirs, *All Said and Done*, she reduces it to a colorless, unambiguous event that serves to illustrate the threats of today's medical technology', in 'Simone de Beauvoir: Aging and its Discontents', in *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, ed. by S. Benstock (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), pp. 90-114 (p. 103).

[30] His work is described as 'achevé' and 'embaumé', and the narrator emphasizes that his death immortalizes him: 'Il était tombé à pic dans l'Histoire […]' (*TCF*, p. 127).

We have seen that the series of presentations of the narrator in the world *dis*embody the Beauvoirian self by downplaying self-representation in the first-person in favour of a 'nous' collectivity which betrays some of Beauvoir's preoccupations as author. In downplaying the singular autobiographical voice of the individual, the text resembles a present-tense polemic. This would also explain why the diary genre, used sporadically in *La Force de l'âge* and *La Force des choses*, and so commonly associated with women's literature, has not been used in this volume, which is closer in parts to historical memoir. In contrast to the writing of the documentary-style narrative, it is, however, possible to trace a series of cyclical selves in the text which underpin an anti-factual narrative. These narratives focusing on the past, death and memory shall now be explored.

La femme privée? Death, Memory and the Past

These alternative narratives provide a means for the author to escape her public persona by accessing a private space via childhood reminiscence and related themes. It will be suggested here that this focus on the past offers an alternative reading of *Tout compte fait*. Indeed, Woodward had already noted the way in which the act of reminiscence ran counter to the existentialist project:

> My second example of the contradictions between Beauvoir's theory and her writing practices is found in *All Said and Done*. In this book, published only two years after *The Coming of Age* [...] Beauvoir […] admits to the pleasures of reminiscence, just as she mentions for the first time the gratification she derives from dreams [...].[31]

This nostalgia for the past is not entirely new in Beauvoir's writing, as I have shown in the preceding chapters, but it is at its most obvious in this final volume.

As noted earlier, in *La Vieillesse* the author had already mentioned the cyclical nature of existence in terms of old age haunting youth and memories of childhood returning in old age. In this volume, *le passé ressuscité* becomes an intrusion on the

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[31] Woodward, 'Simone de Beauvoir: Aging and its Discontents', op. cit., p. 103. She adds that '[W]hat seems to have begun as a life review, in Butler's sense devolves into a chronicle, a recitation of events, a diary' (p. 104).

documentary-style narratives. Childhood is shown to be the key to understanding the psychology of the individual. Indeed, this offers one explanation for the narrator's detailed descriptions of the lives of others. Deguy has explored what he calls Beauvoir's 'curieuse écriture du moi', by focusing on childhood as a global theme of the writing project.[32] He views the opening sections of *Tout compte fait* as 'un spectaculaire retour en arrière, vers l'enfance, son récit et sa signification', where '[...] la sexagénaire s'arroge en effet le droit de revenir sur ses premières années, de refaire en quelque sorte sa copie, livrant un deuxième texte sur l'enfance qui a valeur de repentir [...]'.[33] Completing the cycle, the narrator not only refers to her childhood at the beginning of *Tout compte fait*, but also in her conclusion. Through childhood reminiscence she seeks out the constants in her own character, and her particular concerns are deemed to find their origins there: 'Dissiper les mystifications, dire la vérité, c'est un des buts que j'ai le plus obstinément poursuivis à travers mes livres. Cet entêtement a ses racines dans mon enfance [...]' (*TCF*, p. 633). The emphasis on enduring traits contrasts with the stages of self-development enunciated in the existentialist narrative. However, perhaps more revealing for this analysis is the way in which the review of moments in childhood offers an escape from the contingency of present-day events, as these moments can be selected, elaborated upon and revised for her readers.[34]

Beyond the childhood references and from a broader perspective, it is curious that some events, experiences, friendships, and deaths are detailed in full, whereas others are left unexplained. Keefe asks: 'Why is there so little here about Sartre, and nothing at all on Olga, Bost or Lanzmann?'[35] This absence contrasts with the bulky listings of political events. Relationships are not dwelled upon in this volume, as they had been in the three earlier volumes. As far as female friendships are concerned, the narrator steers clear of personal

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[32] 'Simone de Beauvoir: la quête de l'enfance, le désir du récit, les intermittences du sens', op. cit., p. 97.

[33] Ibid., p. 92, p. 93.

[34] Deguy reminds us of the fact that the rewriting of the early years is necessarily selective: 'Son enfance, comme l'enfance des autres, ont gardé *des zones d'ombre* et le dégagement du sens que ces enfances portaient [...] est resté incomplet', ibid., p. 100.

[35] *Simone de Beauvoir: A Study of her Writings*, op. cit., p. 41.

revelation, preferring either to remain silent or to describe her friends in a detached manner. Both strategies are used for Violette Leduc to the extent that Leduc's life satisfies Beauvoir's curiosity as sociologist but there are certain aspects which she does not wish to broach, preferring to point readers to the preface she wrote for Leduc's autobiographical work, *La Bâtarde*: 'Il y aurait beaucoup d'autres choses à dire sur Violette Leduc: je l'ai fait de mon mieux dans la préface de *La Bâtarde* que je n'ai pas voulu répéter ici' (*TCF*, p. 76). This desire not to go over the same ground is only surprising given the fact that Beauvoir's other works are considered in chapter two. Being unwilling to discuss a friend Evelyne's death is another example of a reticence to bring personal events into public view, and which contrasts with the descriptions, noted earlier, which fell into an 'obituary' style.[36] The events that are deemed to have touched the narrator most deeply are the ones that are not presented in depth to the reader. This apparent *over*-censoring of material underlines the ambiguities suggested earlier in the representation of self in *Tout compte fait*. If a perception of public expectation rules the selection of material, the backlash effect is that the narrator is far more protective of her private space, knowing that her life as text is there for public consumption. *Tout compte fait* effectively serves as a unifying text which attempts to bring every stage of the author's life into a meaningful whole.

However, as suggested earlier, the cyclical structure and some recurring images from childhood reveal themes that might have escaped the narrator's censoring hand. It is significant, for example, that the figure of Zaza appears in the opening chapter and returns in the closing one.[37] Her death, recounted at the end of *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, and rewritten at the beginning of *Tout compte fait*, is echoed in a reference near the end to young people and suicide: 'J'aime mieux essayer d'aider les jeunes dans leur lutte qu'être le témoin passif d'un désespoir qui a conduit certains aux plus affreux suicides' (*TCF*, p. 607). The narrator's reference to waking up with a

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[36] The narrator writes: 'A vrai dire de toutes les morts qui se produisirent dans mon entourage pendant ces dernières années, une seule m'a profondément remuée: celle d'Evelyne. Mais je n'ai pas envie d'en parler' (*TCF*, p. 138).

[37] MacDonald has studied the recurrence of Jacques and Zaza in *Tout compte fait* as part of a repetitive and cyclical autobiographical structure, in 'La Formation d'une chroniqueuse', op. cit., p. 112.

taste of nothingness ('le goût du néant dans mes os' (*TCF*, p. 61)) again reminds us of Zaza's words to Simone in *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*: '[...] j'ai encore le goût du néant dans la bouche' (*MJFR*, p. 385). Further reminders of Zaza at the end of *Tout compte fait* also appear when the narrator discusses her stance on religion and remembers her friend's fate. Thus recurring themes of death and guilt encircle the text.

The Simone-Zaza cycle could also be considered in a different context, compared not only to the Sartre-Beauvoir relationship but also to the Beauvoir-Le Bon association. Both Moi and Marks have discussed the role of Sylvie Le Bon, Beauvoir's adoptive daughter, in terms of a double,[38] Marks emphasizing the double as 'an insurance against the destruction of the ego' and highlighting the difference of gender to argue that, '[T]he alternation between a male and a female suggests the bisexuality of the narrator and the contradictory, transgressive quality of her object choices'.[39] Sylvie is seen as the double who saves, and who is '[...] less an other and different – aside from the difference in age – than she is the same'.[40] Also at the linguistic level, Marks suggests:

> This doubling is confirmed at the level of their names: Simone de Beauvoir and Sylvie le Bon. The similarity between the initial S and the initial B, the alliteration of Si and Sy, the ethical (masculine) resonance between Beau and Bon, even the particle and the definite article are similarly placed.[41]

We could add that a desire to be 'bien vue' also reinforces through her name the need to 'servir', highlighting the ethical nature of the project. Sylvie, as *intellectual* daughter who herself was a philosophy teacher, can be represented outwith a maternal framework, in a pulling away from the corporeal. Beauvoir engenders a daughter with whom she can align herself, and at the same time avoids the question of the

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[38] Moi comments on the Sartre/Sylvie parallel as follows: 'Just as Sartre is represented as Beauvoir's double and twin in *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, in *All Said and Done* Le Bon is consistently represented as her double', in *Simone de Beauvoir*: *The Making of an Intellectual Woman*, op. cit., p. 242.

[39] 'Transgressing the (In)cont(in)ent Boundaries: The Body in Decline?', *Yale French Studies*, 72 (1986), 181-200 (pp. 197-98, p. 186).

[40] Ibid., p. 198.

[41] Ibid., p. 198.

body and maternity. This again places the emphasis on intellectual rather than physical mirrorings. In *Tout compte fait*, Beauvoir's potential death is stalled by her identification with Sylvie as younger double.[42] If Sylvie Le Bon is referred to only briefly in the text, she still offers a link to the future and forges a lineage that will go beyond the narrator's death, as the following quotations suggest: '[…] cela me donnait un peu l'impression d'être réincarnée' (*TCF*, p. 92); '[…] une telle réciprocité que je perds la notion de mon âge: elle m'entraîne dans son avenir [...]' (*TCF*, p. 92).

Thus, at the opposite pole to Zaza, who, as argued in chapter one, implicates Simone in a certain *death*, Sylvie extends Beauvoir's life, less as alter ego than as intellectual daughter. The narrator's aspirations can be projected onto Sylvie, who, the narrator notes, 'me ressemblait' (*TCF*, p. 91). In addition, although Sylvie's background is recounted primarily to show the similarities between the two in struggling to be taken seriously as intellectuals – 'Comme moi c'était une intellectuelle [...]' (*TCF*, p. 91) – the focus on her relationships with women also provides an outlet for the author to deal with issues of importance to her, but in an indirect manner. Indeed, Sylvie's conflicts with her family are used as reminder of the narrator's own past: 'Cette histoire éveillait des échos en moi' (*TCF*, p. 91).

Links to the past and to a past self are established not only via the figures of Zaza and Sylvie. Other escapes into retrospective accounts tied to the private sphere of childhood and which contrast with the documentary-style narrative are revealed through the narrator's recounting of dreams, books, films and her descriptions of the revisiting of certain places. These are exaggerated by the repeated use of the prefix 're', as was the case in *La Force des choses*: 'Nous revoyions nos endroits préférés, nous en redécouvrions certains que nous avions un peu oubliés [...] Nous avons revu les Caravage' (*TCF*, p. 295). Nostalgia seems to be the key in these descriptions in which the escape offered via dream-like states is presented an an appealing alternative to any concrete confrontation with a materiality of self: 'D'une autre manière encore, le passé parfois m'enchante: quand je

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[42] As Mary Evans observed: '[...] there is surely a possibility that choosing as a friend someone younger and yet similar amounts to finding a way of satisfying needs for corroboration and clarification', in *Simone de Beauvoir: A Feminist Mandarin*, op. cit., p. 118.

reconnais des lieux que j'ai aimés' (*TCF*, p. 50). Crucially, within these memories a fantasized loss of self is explored, as suggested by statements made about reading – 'Pour lire, j'aime m'anéantir' (*TCF*, p. 195) – and travelling: 'Un voyage, c'est aussi une aventure personnelle' (*TCF*, p. 291); 'Son foisonnement m'arrache à moi-même [...]' (*TCF*, p. 291).[43]

Authors such as Powys and Vitia Hessel provide further links to the narrator's childhood. The narrator's admiration for the former is centred on his love of the countryside ('amour de la campagne' (*TCF*, p. 217)), and ability to escape from the daily grind ('carcan de l'existence quotidienne') by bringing to light 'une face d'ombre qui demeure cependant cachée' (*TCF*, p. 218). Likewise, reading Vitia Hessel, argues the narrator, 'me fait rêver à ma propre enfance' (*TCF*, p. 223). Comments made about the importance of social conditioning in the context of Hessel's work ('Elle montre comment les adultes ont été conditionnés par leur enfance et conditionnent celle de leurs enfants [...]' (*TCF*, p. 223)) also serve as reminder of the theoretical concerns of *Le Deuxième sexe*. These examples are cited to demonstrate the extent to which a fantasized *loss of self* puts Beauvoir at odds with the basic tenets of the autobiographical enterprise.

As far as dreams are concerned, the narrator's descriptions have led critics such as Keefe to wonder about the relevance of such material.[44] Within the framework established in this section, it becomes possible to see why dreams might have been included. The author has the freedom in these texts to write without the need for details, explanations and evidence demanded by the essayist mode. The preference for this alternative narrative is suggested by the comment: 'J'en aime l'imprévu et surtout la gratuité' (*TCF*, p. 139). In contrast to the existentialist framework which privileges the twin notions of freedom and choice, dreams are enjoyed for their contingency and randomness. They also open up the re-examination of

[43] References to loss of self through travel and reading are numerous: 'C'est ce qui me séduit dans les voyages: la vie rêvée l'emporte sur la vie vécue; je me raconte des histoires et je joue à changer de peau' (*TCF*, p. 293). See also *TCF*, pp. 193-94. Cinema and theatre offer similar escapist opportunities: 'En entrant dans un cinéma je me quitte [...]' (*TCF*, p. 243); '[...] un bonheur analogue à ceux que j'ai connus dans mon enfance [...]' (*TCF*, p. 269).
[44] *Simone de Beauvoir: A Study of Her Writings*, op. cit., p. 41.

childhood but from a perspective that incorporates the irrational and the involuntary: '[…] cet univers de fantasmes et d'enfance où les désirs sont assouvis, les craintes avouées, toute répression ignorée […]' (*TCF*, p. 140). In addition, the dream narratives also usher in more ominous signs ('un pressentiment de ma mort' (*TCF*, p. 160)). The pleasurable engagement with the dreamworld – 'Dans l'ensemble c'est avec plaisir qu'en m'endormant je vais au-devant de mes aventures nocturnes [...]' (*TCF*, pp. pp. 160-61) – offers the means to contemplate death in a passive nihilistic manner; this sets up a parallel with Jacques, who, according to the narrator, had represented 'la part du rêve' in childhood (*TCF*, p. 31). The fact that the exploration of dreams in the text follows the narrator's descriptions of the deaths of others is perhaps not coincidental either.[45]

In fact, the narrator's reminiscences extend beyond childhood and the world of dreams to encompass a questioning of the links between past, present and future, and the impact of time on individuals and objects. In particular, a fascination with architecture and with structures of all kinds informs a narrative that foregrounds the acts of revisiting and rewriting.[46] A meticulous noting of dates underlines a desire to prove the lasting nature of all kinds of edifices and betrays a deeper significance than the narrator's simple description of the buildings around her. Those that have withstood the test of time and those that have fared less well serve as backdrop for meditations on resistance to ageing and the themes of human degeneration and resuscitation (*TCF*, p. 309). The narrator insists that time is not always destructive: 'Mais le temps n'est pas toujours destructeur; en France, en Italie, en Yougoslavie j'ai vu ressusciter des fresques, des architectures que des négligences ou des cataclysmes avaient masquées ou détruites' (*TCF*, p. 294).[47] Here, she draws upon

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[45] One reviewer of the English translation, *All Said and Done*, deemed these sections the more memorable of the book: 'When much of this volume is forgotten one of her dream landscapes, an avenue of snow peopled with grey ghosts, might stay in the mind [...]', in 'The Last Testament of an Intellectual', *Times Literary Supplement*, 3768 (24 May 1974), 543-44 (p. 544).

[46] As Evans remarks: '[...] she finds towards the end of her life a renewed interest in her own country, from its domestic architecture to its politics', *Simone de Beauvoir* (1996), op. cit., p. 91.

[47] See also, for example, her description of Oradour as 'pétrifiée par la mort' (*TCF*, p. 320), and the towns of Gers which have stood the test of time: 'Ce qui m'a le plus

images of timelessness for the purposes of her own aesthetic, in the process stressing aspects of civilization that are ongoing and indestructible. On a formal level, this suggests a further externalization of the blocks of narrative which bulked out *La Force des choses*.

Conversely, those structures which do not survive the effects of time are shown to manifest human-like symptoms of suffering. Thus, the description of Lyons compares the city to a sick old *woman*, bringing the gendered perspective to light: '[...] la ville m'a laissé une impression de tristesse: elle est si vétuste et si peu soignée qu'elle paraît malsaine' (*TCF*, p. 326). The references to sickness and degeneration set up associations with the portrayals of 'Lise' and 'Camille' in the memoirs. To the narrator, the latter are incarnations of an alienating female otherness, described from the standpoint of the objective observer.

In a wider context, it is significant that in *Tout compte fait* the narrator chooses to describe the degeneration of others but not herself. Her physical presence is understated, if not absent, and contrasts with the representation of the ageing self in *La Force des choses*. The narrator would appear to prefer to describe the physical degeneration of others while preserving for herself a *voice* in writing which defies time. Indeed, she suggests an alienation of mind from body in comments such as the following: 'Quand je pense que mon cadavre me survivra, cela crée d'étranges rapports entre mon corps et moi' (*TCF*, p. 61).[48] The presentation of a public persona and the intrusion on the narrative of a retrospective account of the past via Zaza, and alternative depictions of the present and future via Sylvie, reveal the narrator's oscillating positions in her self-representation; these all overshadow the depiction of an ageing, embodied self.

Writing the Ending: Genres and the Woman Writer

If the ageing self is downplayed in this volume, how does Beauvoir consider her identity specifically as woman *writer*? Numerous

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charmée ce sont deux bourgs fortifiés que le passage des siècles n'a presque pas touchés' (*TCF*, p. 324).

[48] See also her sense of alienation when imagining herself as old woman: '[...] ce sera une très vieille femme qui disparaîtra. Je ne peux pas m'émouvoir de la mort de cette octogénaire, je ne souhaite pas me survivre en elle' (*TCF*, p. 62).

references scattered in the text refer to a gendered identity and destiny: '[…] pour mon entourage et pour moi, mon devoir d'enfant et d'adolescente consistait à façonner la femme que je serais demain' (*TCF*, p. 27). The narrator is at pains to stress the constants of her personality that link the young girl to the older writer,[49] and the origins of the writing project are traced back to childhood, and to identifications with female role models:

> [...] vers quatorze ans, m'étant identifiée à la Joe de Luisa Alcott, à la Maggie de George Eliot, j'ai souhaité revêtir moi-même, aux yeux d'un public, cette dimension imaginaire qui rendait pour moi si fascinantes ces héroïnes de roman et l'auteur qui se projetait en elle (*TCF*, p. 634).[50]

Writing as necessary activity is reinforced by an intratextual cycle which associates women writers, heroines and the author herself. The narrator questions what it means to be a French woman writer of a certain age: 'Être femme, française, écrivain, âgée de soixante-quatre ans en 1972, qu'est-ce que cela signifie?' (*TCF*, p. 58). Such self-questioning resembles the author's earlier justifications for writing *Le Deuxième sexe* and it may be true that for women writers of Beauvoir's generation greater freedom was offered to write about personal preoccupations under the guise of the universal 'on' of a general women's condition.

In fact, in the concluding sections of *Le Deuxième sexe* the dilemmas and problems presented match closely the narrator's self-questioning about her gendered identity and role as writer and intellectual. For example, statements made about the divided identity of the intellectual woman appear highly autobiographical as Beauvoir insists: 'Il n'est pas divisé. Tandis qu'il est demandé à la femme pour accomplir sa féminité de se faire objet et proie, c'est-à-dire de

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[49] 'Ce qui me frappe, au contraire, c'est comment la petite fille de trois ans se survit, assagie, dans celle de dix ans, celle-ci dans la jeune fille de vingt ans, et ainsi de suite' (*TCF*, p. 46); 'Mais je me reconnais à travers tous mes changements' (*TCF*, p. 47).

[50] These references to writing and a female identity are reminiscent of the narrator's identification in *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* with Maggie Tulliver, but not with her fate: '[...] Maggie Tulliver était comme moi divisée entre les autres et elle-même: je me reconnus en elle' (*MJFR*, p. 195); '*Je n'envisageai pas d'en mourir*. A travers son héroïne, *je m'identifiai à l'auteur*: un jour une adolescente, une autre moi-même, tremperait de ses larmes un roman où j'aurais raconté ma propre histoire' (*MJFR*, p. 195) (my emphasis).

renoncer à ses revendications de sujet souverain' (*DS*, II, p. 600).[51] It is in this context that she broaches specifically female concerns such as, for example, the menopause as turning point in women's lives, both physically and creatively ('C'est souvent au moment de la ménopause que la femme pour compenser les failles de son existence se jette sur le pinceau ou sur la plume: il est bien tard [...]' (*DS*, II, p. 628)).[52] Such excerpts provide a point of contrast with the intellectualized and universalized discourse of *Tout compte fait*. This is an apparent reversal of convention and highlights the problematic relationship between autobiography as clearly defined *genre* and Beauvoir's various modes of self-representation. Conversely, the more generalized comments in *Tout compte fait* resist self-disclosure by highlighting the autobiographer's stance as external observer, as Hewitt has argued: '[...] in each instance, de Beauvoir ultimately envisions herself outside the issues: she judges the bourgeoisie as outsider; she participates in the women's movement in order to help *other* women accede to her own status'.[53] In this respect the documentational role of the autobiography overshadows the self-representation of the author and Beauvoir's legacy comes across as an overwhelmingly intellectualized one.

The retrospective writing that was the focus of the last section is arguably the locus of Beauvoir's most 'authentic' expression of self in its writing of the temporal and the mortal. Intersubjective relations are traced more clearly, as Beauvoir's regrets, fears, and desires surface in the glances backwards. In the non-existentialist realms of dreams, the unconscious, and the shadows of others, we glimpse Beauvoir the autobiographer, as opposed to her presentation as essayist and (gender non-specific) intellectual. It appears, then, that explorations of the specific dilemmas of the woman intellectual, although suggested indirectly in *Tout compte fait* via Sylvie, for

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[51] See her comments on the conflicts and problems facing women writers, especially those related to reductive stereotypes (*DS*, II, p. 628), and also her criticism of women writers themselves, which could be read as self-critique: 'Encore tout émerveillées d'avoir reçu la permission d'explorer ce monde, elles en font l'inventaire sans chercher à en découvrir le sens. Là où parfois elles excellent c'est dans l'observation de ce qui est donné: elles font de remarquables reporters [...]' (*DS*, II, p. 635).

[52] See also her comments on female eroticism: '[...] son érotisme, donc son monde sexuel, ayant une figure singulière ne saurait manquer d'engendrer chez elle une sensualité, une sensibilité singulière [...]' (*DS*, II, p. 661).

[53] *Autobiographical Tightropes*, op. cit., p. 48.

example, might be found more specifically in *Le Deuxième sexe*. *Tout compte fait*, as *final word*, highlights, above all, the persona of the *public* figure.

'I come back (autobiographise) from beyond the tomb [...]'.[54]

One reviewer of *Tout compte fait* commented that, '[O]ne theme, here as elsewhere in her writings, still ignites Beauvoir's imagination – that of death. [...] Dying is the final anti-freedom; and it has been life-giving to Beauvoir's writing'.[55] I would argue that Beauvoir writes *Tout compte fait* as *testament*, and that in doing so, downplays the image of the ageing female body that was depicted in *La Force des choses* to make way for a *voix d'outre tombe* that lends force to the voice of the writer and intellectual. Maclean defined 'testament' thus:

> [...] a testament is a statement of what one bequeaths, whether it be one's property, one's works, one's beliefs or, of course, in the last resort one's life laid down for others. [...] was intended to be both autothanatography and encomium, or formalized praise for a life well spent in the service of the public. As Bakhtin has made clear, this ancient genre confirms a mythical status posthumously conferred, but seen as conferred on a career rather than a person.[56]

This would certainly support the fact that it is principally Beauvoir's career which is written for posterity in *Tout compte fait*, and Ascher's reference to the 'prematurely embalming title' is apt in this respect.[57] Moreover, the title, prologue and epilogue, as metatexts, present the image of an immortalized figure whose life seems in many ways to be immutable. This serves as reminder of the paradoxical nature of the autobiographical act, as Stoekl argued:

> This of course is a fundamental fact of *all* autobiography, and its paradox: the author who would write his own life – his entire life – cannot record the moment when he comes to face his death, when he experiences it. Strictly speaking, no autobiography can be an autobiography unless it records both

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[54] In Smith, *Derrida and Autobiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), p. 143.

[55] 'The Last Testament of an Intellectual', op. cit., p. 544.

[56] *The Name of the Mother: Writing Illegitimacy* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 124. Maclean used this definition in her study of Flora Tristan's *Le Testament de la pariah*.

[57] *Simone de Beauvoir: A Life of Freedom*, op. cit., p. 44.

> what the author lives to experience, and the passage to what is no longer life.[58]

Beauvoir's self-perception as unchanging individual suggests that she is contesting this fact: 'Mais aucun événement public ni privé n'a profondément modifié ma situation: *je n'ai pas changé*' (*TCF*, p. 10) (my emphasis). Other statements reinforce the notion that the author is presenting her life as complete (or almost): 'Je n'ai plus l'impression de me diriger vers un but mais seulement de glisser inéluctablement vers ma tombe' (*TCF*, p. 10); 'Aujourd'hui ma vie est faite, mon œuvre est faite' (*TCF*, p. 193).

Furthermore, her construction of *Tout compte fait* could be viewed as the final tom(b)e of the autobiographies. Jardine has already referred to *Une mort très douce* and *La Cérémonie des adieux* as 'tomb books', as figures are buried in and by the narrative, notably images of the mother.[59] In *Tout compte fait* Beauvoir embalms herself as writer, by creating her own tombstone. She is, then, writing her own death as opposed to Sartre's or her mother's. By preserving her name as intellectual woman, it is not the portrayal of her own physical degeneration, but more the preservation of a disembodied voice in writing which will be left behind. Unlike *La Force des choses*, in *Tout compte fait* traces of the ageing, physical self are replaced in the text by blocks of narrative that could be described as textual 'edifices' that defy a linear chronology.

These narratives (on childhood, writing, reading, trips, politics and timeless architectural structures) are enclosed by the prologue and conclusion, held together by the *fils conducteurs* of freedom and chance, and supported by Beauvoir's authorial voice which directs the

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[58] *Politics, Writing, Mutilation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 65, in Smith, *Derrida and Autobiography*, op. cit., p. 73. The relationship between autobiography and death is also explored by Mijolla-Mellor, who writes: 'Il n'y a d'autobiographie que posthume, mais l'auteur doit néanmoins être vivant pour l'écrire', in 'Survivre à son passé', *L'Autobiographie: VIes Rencontres psychanalytiques d'Aix-en-Provence*, 1987 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1988), pp. 101-28 (pp. 104-5).

[59] 'Death Sentences: Writing Couples and Ideology', op. cit., p. 215. Jardine asks: 'Is there a way to write without embalming the past?; without writing tombs? Without dismembering the female body [...] without killing our mothers, the mother in us?', *Poetics Today*, 6, 1-2 (1985), 119-31 (p. 130).

reader. The divisions of the life into distinct realms could answer the question why Beauvoir chose to group her memoirs in themes rather than to write them chronologically. This strategy is successful for the first section of the book, which covers the period 1908 to 1962. However, when the narrator then picks up where *La Force des choses* left off, the chronological thread (with its references to dates and more documentary style) cannot help but invade the narratives and the tight structures then start to give way to a more fragmented style akin to the earlier volumes. Such narrative structures serve as bulwark against apprehensions of contingency, of time fleeting, and the reality of human degeneration. The fact that Beauvoir's writing activities are described separately from her travels effectively presents the two spheres of her life, as writer, and as political activist, as disconnected. The public life is objectified as chronological document and the private sphere is hidden behind thematic edifices such as 'reading' and 'writing'. Different interests are shown not to bear any relation to each other and the voice of the writerly self is overshadowed in the later sections of the book by a more distanced, documentary style.

Reading *Tout compte fait* as *testament* also has certain implications for the reader, as *legatee*.[60] The fact that Beauvoir chooses to reassess her life, and to consider the years already dealt with in the earlier volumes, draws attention to the fact that her positioning is not just as writer of *Tout compte fait*, but also as reader of her previous three volumes of autobiography. She is therefore also her own legatee. This dual identity informs the writing of the final volume as Beauvoir the *reader* will influence the rewriting of the life in *Tout compte fait*, based on her reading of the earlier texts. Beauvoir as 'engaged' reader is then her own ideal reader, as she rereads and reinterprets her life through the intellectual's lens, and, as *writer*, creates her epitaph.

In his analysis of the author-reader relationship, Lejeune has highlighted the interrelationship in autobiography between first, second and third person, and the reader's key positioning with respect

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[60] Defined in the Oxford English dictionary as 'a person to whom a legacy has been bequeathed'.

to this trio.[61] In *Tout compte fait* the conclusion is left in the readers' hands, apparently to be interpreted as they wish: 'Cette fois, je ne donnerai pas de conclusion à mon livre. Je laisse au lecteur le soin d'en tirer celles qui lui plairont' (*TCF*, p. 634). However, I would argue that in the prologue and epilogue the narrator gives very clear indications of how she would like us to interpret the final volume, namely as the concluding volume ('compléter mon autobiographie' (*TCF*, p. 9)). The author's desire for control to choose the manner and point at which her autobiography will end places her back into an existentialist framework of making choices and situates her within an intellectual autobiographical tradition where she can totalize her experience without dealing with any imposed *fin*. This underlines the inevitable fact that the moment of death cannot be chosen, unless one commits suicide in order to assume an existentialist act.[62] In the conclusion, the narrator confirms the success of her *completed* project by emphasizing her own self-imposed closure: 'Je voulais me faire exister pour les autres en leur communiquant, de la manière la plus directe, le goût de ma propre vie: j'y ai à peu près réussi' (*TCF*, p. 633). Furthermore, in denying that it is a work of art in an aesthetic sense – 'Je n'ai pas été une virtuose de l'écriture' (*TCF*, p. 633) – the narrator implies that her own criteria as far as autobiography is concerned may be different from her predecessors. Most significantly, she had already in fact discussed her desire for an impossible totalization of experience earlier in the work:

> J'ai actuellement le souci de récupérer ma vie: ranimer les souvenirs oubliés, relire, revoir, compléter des connaissances inachevées, combler des lacunes, élucider des points obscurs, rassembler ce qui est épars. Comme s'il devait y avoir un moment où mon expérience serait totalisée, comme s'il importait que cette totalisation fût effectuée (*TCF*, p. 60).

In this key paragraph, an acceptance of mortality combines with a writing practice that aims to prolong the life beyond the tomb:

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[61] He cites Valéry ('Le moi se dit *moi* ou *toi* ou *il*. Il y a les 3 personnes en moi. La Trinité', *Cahiers*, 1 (Paris: Pléiade, 1973), p. 440), in 'Peut-on innover en autobiographie?', in *L'Autobiographie: VIes Rencontres psychanalytiques d'Aix-en-Provence*, op. cit., pp. 67-100 (p. 83).

[62] In Dastur's philosophical study, *La Mort: essai sur la finitude* (Paris: Hatier, 1994), she refers to suicide as a philosophical act, 'conforme aux conditions et aux caractéristiques d'une action transcendantale' (p. 25).

> Moi j'agis comme si mon existence devait se perpétuer par-delà ma tombe telle que j'aurai réussi dans mes dernières années à la reconquérir. Je sais bien pourtant que 'je ne l'emporterai pas avec moi'. Je mourrai tout entière (*TCF*, p. 60).

Dying 'tout entière' suggests that there is no place for a degenerating body within this framework. Beauvoir's academic voice dominates, and the lasting impression of the writer is as role model for others (whether for a fellow writer such as Violette Leduc or for the many *lectrices* referred to in the text), in a narrative that leaves little room for the expression of more private doubts, as was the case in *La Force des choses*.

A further question raised by the comparison of *Tout compte fait* with a *testament* is whether Sylvie Le Bon could be seen to represent the executor, defined as 'a person appointed by the testator to execute or carry into effect his will after his decease'.[63] In reality, she has been responsible since Beauvoir's death in 1986 for publishing the posthumous works as her *literary* executor. She thus perpetuates Beauvoir's 'voice' as she sees fit.[64] As far as the legacy itself is concerned, it is perhaps not surprising that the author commented during an interview that, '[É]crire *embaume* le passé, mais cela le laisse un peu *figé* comme une momie' (my emphasis).[65] *Tout compte fait* creates the voice to be remembered by, in preserving the name once the bearer has gone. In this regard, Derrida's comments on the power of the signature to preserve a name strike a chord with the writing practice of *Tout compte fait*:

> In calling or naming someone while he is alive, we know that his name can survive him and *already survives him*; the name begins during his life to get along without him, speaking and bearing his death each time it is

[63] The Oxford English dictionary definition.

[64] Sylvie Le Bon edited the *Lettres à Sartre*, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1990) and *Journal de Guerre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), and has retranslated into French Beauvoir's *Lettres à Nelson Algren. Un amour transatlantique, 1947-1964* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997). See also in this context Mijolla-Mellor, who highlights the status of the dead author: 'Le fait d'être mort ne donne-t-il pas en outre à l'auteur une crédibilité et un sérieux incomparables?', in 'Survivre à son passé', op. cit., p. 105.

[65] *Simone de Beauvoir: un film de Josée Dayan and Malka Ribowska*, op. cit., p. 92.

> pronounced in naming or calling, each time it is inscribed in a list, or a civil registry, or a signature.[66]

Furthermore, De Man's comments on 'prosopopeia', or the use of the voice or face to mask mortality within autobiography, also resonate here with regard to the narrator's reference to a fantasized disembodied voice from the grave:

> As soon as we understand the rhetorical function of prosopopeia as positing voice or face by means of language, we also understand that what we are deprived of is not life but the shape and the sense of a world accessible only in the privative way of understanding. Death is a displaced name for a linguistic predicament, and the restoration of mortality by autobiography (the prosopopeia of the voice and the name) deprives and disfigures to the precise extent that it restores. Autobiography veils a defacement of the mind of which it is itself the cause.[67]

In fact, after the publication of *Tout compte fait*, Beauvoir went on to write *La Cérémonie des adieux*, which documents the death of Sartre, and in which her voice prevails once more. As Idt observed: 'Les tombeaux sont vides, ils ne portent trace que de leur sculpteur. *La Cérémonie des adieux* a donc déçu ceux qui y cherchaient Sartre et ont trouvé Beauvoir'.[68] Thus *Tout compte fait* itself seems to have been overshadowed as *final* testament by later 'adieux'.

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Beauvoir's borrowing of the essay mode in *Tout compte fait* is, to a large degree, well-suited to her rigorous and methodical style of research and mirrors her earlier projects.[69] This seems to be in

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[66] *Mémoires: pour Paul de Man* (Paris: Galilée, 1988, p. 63)/*Mémoires: For Paul de Man* (1989, p. 49), in Smith, op. cit., p. 72. See also Gilmore's discussion of the name as signature in her second chapter entitled 'Technologies of Autobiography', in *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1994).

[67] 'Autobiography as De-Facement', in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1984), pp. 67-81 (pp. 80-81), in Smith, op. cit., p. 163.

[68] '*La Cérémonie des adieux* de Simone de Beauvoir: rite funéraire et défi littéraire', *Revue des sciences humaines*, 192 (October-December 1983), 15-33 (p. 24).

[69] As Bieber argued: 'Thus, from something of a strait-jacket, the essay became a congenial vehicle for Beauvoir, and she mastered its practice', in 'Ill at Ease: Simone de Beauvoir and the Essay', *French Literature Series*, 9 (1982), 84-95 (p. 94).

response to her perceived sense of duty in the face of History to record the events which she has witnessed in the world around her, and also with reader expectations in mind.[70] As writer, the 'public' voice of Beauvoir may be the most forceful one; certainly, the risk of revealing a private self and of having one's work relegated to a minor position as *woman* autobiographer was a factor not to be taken lightly. Such restrictions and conventions governing the reception of Beauvoir's writing at the time have to be considered in this light. The perceived successes and failures of earlier publications would also have influenced decisions made concerning her subsequent writing. In sum, *Tout compte fait* as 'tom(b)e' stands as testimony of the life of the public figure whose voice as intellectual is preserved within its very structures.

Indeed, the legacy of Beauvoir's success as author of *Le Deuxième sexe* lives on in the essay style of *Tout compte fait*. In fact, the two works overlap since personal issues concerning the woman writer, taken up in the third person in *Le Deuxième sexe*, are not broached in the public domain of the autobiographical subject of *Tout compte fait*.[71] Differences were noted earlier between the reflections on the gendered self which Beauvoir is prepared to author as 'je' in *Tout compte fait* and the revelations which are only discussed through the impersonal third-person 'elle' in *Le Deuxième sexe*. It is worth bearing in mind the fact that the author had abandoned the early autobiographical project to write *Le Deuxième sexe*. The latter incorporates as its two axes of the Beauvoirian enterprise both the autobiographical and the polemical: 'Je fus si intéressée que j'abandonnai le projet d'une confession personnelle pour m'occuper de la condition féminine [...]' (*FC*, I, p. 136). One might ask whether the return to the 'tried and tested' essay-like formula of *Le Deuxième*

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[70] For example, the sense of responsibility to document the horrors is underlined in the narrator's description of documents presented before the Russell Tribunal: 'Ils nous ont montrés des cadavres civils, brûlés, mutilés et aussi des hommes, des femmes, vivants mais horriblement blessés' (*TCF*, p. 475); 'Ces témoignages étaient extrêmement pénibles à entendre: les horreurs qu'ils décrivaient, ces hommes les avaient vues de leurs yeux [...]' (*TCF*, p. 487).

[71] Hewitt suggested that *Le Deuxième sexe* could be described as 'an attempt at a generalized autobiography of women, with de Beauvoir supplying the voice of her own particular preoccupations', in *Autobiographical Tightropes*, op. cit., p. 18. She cites Beauvoir's own confirmation of the role of the particular within the universal (p. 18).

sexe offered a means of overshadowing the experimental fictional voices of the 1960s; Beauvoir seems to draw on her strengths as essayist rather than as autobiographer in the conventional mould to create her final volume of autobiography. If we consider the two works as part of a wider project of writing the self, the public and private expressions of self need not necessarily be viewed as antithetical. Paradoxically, *Le Deuxième sexe*, published over twenty years before *Tout compte fait*, appears to have offered Beauvoir greater freedom of expression autobiographically as woman writer, via the third person, than the first-person narrative voice allows in *Tout compte fait*. Within the volume the female body, which had been part of a rhetoric of death in *La Force des choses*, has now been written out of the text into death and degeneration in favour of a disembodied *voix d'outre tombe* – her own. The author's preoccupations in these texts are different, and *Tout compte fait* stands primarily as intellectual and ethical *testament*.

Thus, in *Tout compte fait*, the term 'autothanatography' becomes the writing of one's life *in anticipation of* death. Beauvoir mirrors yet another literary forefather, Montaigne, whose *Essais* had already traced a path in philosophizing an acceptance of mortality, and in writing with the perspective of death in mind.[72] I would argue that this governs Beauvoir's choice of material and distanced, academic stance as essayist. However, it also encompasses the choice not to put the private self up as object for the reader to view, the death of representations of the embodied female self of the writer, and the death of the existentialist narrative under the weight of counter-narratives rewriting the past. If the term 'freedom' was cited earlier as one of the *fils conducteurs* of the autobiographies, it is paradoxical that the recognition of Beauvoir's status as writer and political activist at the time of writing *Tout compte fait* also played a part in limiting her personal freedom and privacy.

In writing *Tout compte fait* as final word, Beauvoir exerts her freedom to choose her moment of autobiographical 'literary suicide', heralding a concomitant autothanatographical *birth*. This ultimate existentialist choice underlines the intellectual presentation of the life where the ethical is valued as governing aesthetic; Beauvoir negotiates

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[72] Montaigne, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Pléiade, 1962), first published 1580.

with the ultimate *irréversibles*, by choosing her (textual) moments of birth and death. The moments of birth and death also, however, preserve a personal space within the text, as they are essentially private experiences, far from the public sphere which increasingly influences the manner of the narrator's self-expression. In this respect, it is possible to trace the overlapping public and private experiences of self in the text. Beauvoir's writing styles in *Tout compte fait* signal her desire for her autobiographical *œuvre* to be legitimated and incorporated into a 'universalizing' canon. This work seems, however, to have been rejected from such a classification, yet has not been singled out for its innovation of, or revolt against, the genre either. Reading *Tout compte fait* as *testament* suggests a framework that takes into account both canonical models and the particular difficulties for the woman autobiographer to present herself within a largely male-defined discourse, and, furthermore, to determine the legacy that is left behind. This legacy is further shaped by the publication of two biographical texts: *Une mort très douce* and *La Cérémonie des adieux*, to be examined in due course.

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CHAPTER V

Une mort très douce

The publication of *Une mort très douce* in 1964 marks a shift of emphasis in Beauvoir's œuvre. In this work, the author focuses not on herself but on her mother. This more biographical volume interrupts the autobiographical series and is then followed by fiction and an essay (*Les Belles images*, *La Femme rompue*, *La Vieillesse*). The author returns to autobiography 'proper' with the publication of *Tout compte fait* in 1972, and *La Cerémonie des adieux* follows in 1981. In comparison with the broad social and historical panorama offered in the autobiographies, *Une mort très douce* and *La Cérémonie des adieux* present a narrower frame of reference, the space of the clinic dominating in the former, and the backdrops of Paris and Rome in the latter.[1] Both provide further elaboration of the author's negotiations of death, and serve as an addendum in which some of the recurring narrative practices and concerns already traced through the four volumes of autobiography may be pursued.

In terms of the autobiographical genre, it is tempting to situate *Une mort très douce* and *La Cérémonie des adieux* differently from the autobiographical volumes since they are more overtly biographical in nature, the former focusing on the death of Françoise de Beauvoir and the latter on the last years of Jean-Paul Sartre's life. Nonetheless, the interplay of narratives of self and other combine here as they do in the four volumes of autobiography discussed earlier. These two texts suggest, however, a departure from the author's autobiographical 'project' of writing the self. Indeed, *Une mort très douce* is categorized as 'récit' on the front cover of the Gallimard edition. Miller elaborates on these questions of genre further:

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[1] For example, Fell notes that '[A]lthough unquestionably autobiographical, it bears little resemblance to the more "public" autobiographical narratives with their long descriptions of foreign visits and political activism of the successful Beauvoir-Sartre couple produced during the 1960s', in 'Double Vision: Mother(s) in Simone de Beauvoir's *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* and *A Very Easy Death*', in *Representing Lives: Women and Auto/biography*, ed. by Alison Donnell and Pauline Polkey (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 251-59 (p. 254).

> We have tended to think of autobiography as the history of a becoming – attaining freedom, finding a voice, getting published – and often an overcoming of obstacles, crises, incapacities. Here the autobiographical narrative, by its focus on the failing other, provides the account of an undoing, an unbecoming. But this is only one side of 'notebook realism'. The other side of the story has to do with the gain offered by that loss.[2]

Her emphasis on processes of 'becoming' and 'unbecoming', and in particular what is learned from the latter, opens up these texts to readings that foreground the interplay of narratives of self and 'failing' Other. Bearing Miller's comments in mind, in the analysis that follows I will argue that the narrator's confrontations with the dying body reveal ongoing negotiations with existentialism from the perspective of a 'situated' self. [3]

It is widely acknowledged that Beauvoir broached taboos in her depictions of the dying body, in particular, the dying body of the mother in *Une mort très douce*.[4] Critics have explored in detail the narrator's representation of her mother's body in this text, Fell arguing that, 'the embodiment of the mother in their autobiographical texts allows Beauvoir and Ernaux to write "out of their bodies"', but that at times 'their narratives fall apart under the strain of doing so'.[5] Others

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[2] 'Autobiographical Deaths', *Massachusetts Review*, 33, 1 (Spring 1992), 19-47 (p. 46).

[3] Lundgren-Gothlin situates Beauvoir's thought within a phenomenological tradition, arguing that analysis of 'le corps sexué' and intersubjectivity reveals a greater consideration of the mitigating role of situation, especially for women, than Sartre's focus on freedom entailed, in 'Lire Simone de Beauvoir à la lumière de Heidegger', *Les Temps modernes*, 619 (2002), 53-77 (68-69). See also Kruks, *Retrieving Experience: Subjectivity and Recognition in Feminist Politics* (Cornell, Cornell UP, 2001), and Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), who have both brought the question of embodiment and the 'situated self' to the fore in the context of Beauvoir's œuvre.

[4] Marks in 'Transgressing the (In)cont(in)ent Boundaries: The Body in Decline?', *Yale French Studies*, 72 (1986), 181-200, and Miller in 'Autobiographical Deaths', op. cit., explore this reception and discuss prevailing attitudes about what is and is not deemed appropriate for public dissemination.

[5] Fell considers the extent to which Mme de Beauvoir is positioned as an overdetermined mother figure who serves as target for Beauvoir's critique of the mother's role in a patriarchal society, in '"Il fallait que ma mère devienne histoire": Embodying the mother in Simone de Beauvoir's *Une mort très douce* and Annie Ernaux's *Une femme*', *The Mother in/and French Literature*, ed. by Buford Norman (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), *FLS*, 27 (2000), 167-177 (pp. 168-69). See also Corbin,

hone in on the conflictual mother-daughter relationship and trace depictions of transformations of Mme de Beauvoir from much maligned mother to vulnerable old woman. In her article, Jardine argues that Beauvoir is susceptible to 'the poetics of ideology that insists upon killing the mother': 'She must evacuate the dangerous body [...] so that she may continue to write'.[6] In addition, Hughes considers the presentation of medical ethics (specifically the question of euthanasia), medicalized discourse, dying and death in the text.[7] However, one aspect not studied in detail is the extent to which the work demonstrates a shift in the narrator's depiction of *herself* and her mother in the light of the mother's death.

In this chapter, I propose to examine such depictions in a text that combines autobiography and biography, and that encompasses narratives of the past, commentaries in the present, projections into the future and even a fantasized 'future anterior'. In particular, the analysis will focus on the ways in which Beauvoir's existentialist and feminist critiques inform her representations of her mother's life and death, and the ways in which her own life is shown in turn to both inform and be informed by her mother's life. It will be argued that a need for separation is accompanied by more reconciliatory moments of identification. What is striking is the fact that the moments of identification with the mother are rooted in a shared horror of death and enthusiasm for life that depart from the daughter's emphasis in the *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* on the need for separation from the mother in order to *live*.[8] In fact, patterns of role reversals, and the

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The Mother Mirror: Self-Representation and the Mother-Daughter Relation in Colette, Simone de Beauvoir and Marguerite Duras (New York: Peter Lang, 1996); Patterson, *Simone de Beauvoir and the Mystification of Motherhood* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1989); Kadish, 'Simone de Beauvoir's *Une mort très douce*: Existential and Feminist Perspectives on Old Age', *French Review*, 62, 4 (March 1989), 631-39; and Montfort, 'La Vieille Née: Simone de Beauvoir, *Une mort très douce*, and Annie Ernaux, *Une femme*', *French Forum*, 21, 3 (September 1996), 349-64.

[6] 'Death Sentences: Writing Couples and Ideology', *Poetics Today*, 6, 1-2 (1985), 119-31 (p. 129).

[7] See 'Configuring the Clinic: Medical Geographies in Guibert and Beauvoir', in *Heterographies: Sexual Difference in French Autobiography* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), pp. 119-36.

[8] Keefe has noted the importance of this relationship: '[…] the intense relationship, begun when Beauvoir was brought into the world, did not come to an abrupt end with her mother's death. That she felt the need to write a book about it already provides

depiction of textual deaths and 'resurrections' of self occur in a work that departs from a traditional, linear, biographical chronology tracing a life from birth to death.

Avidité **and Thanatos in the Lives of Two *Jeunes filles rangées***

The narrator reviews her mother's life in conjunction with her own in a text written (unlike the *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*) after the mother's death. She reveals her conflicting feelings towards her mother, and foregrounds through the depiction of Mme de Beauvoir many of the concerns examined in earlier autobiographical works. The analysis that follows draws attention to particular choices of words or images which create associations between the depictions of the lives of the mother and the daughter. These juxtapositions and identifications form part of a narrative of reparation in a text that has been commonly viewed as one in which the daughter enacts symbolic violence on her mother by depicting her death in such graphic detail. However, it could be argued that alongside the portrait of a conflictual mother-daughter relationship runs a more empathetic portrayal.

In the opening section, which narrates the events following Mme de Beauvoir's fall and hospitalization, the narrator pauses to reflect on her mother's method of dealing with changing circumstances in her life:

> Elle avait tourné une page avec un étonnant courage après la mort de mon père. Elle en avait eu un violent chagrin. Mais elle ne s'était pas enlisé dans son passé. Elle avait profité de la *liberté retrouvée* pour *se reconstruire* une existence conforme à ses goûts (*MTD*, p. 24) (my emphasis).

There is a certain admiration for the way in which Mme de Beauvoir has rebuilt her life after the death of her husband. The narrator uses key existentialist terms ('liberté', 'se reconstruire') to describe her mother's determination to forge a new life at the age of fifty-four. Even the financial imperative – 'Papa ne lui laissait pas un sou et elle avait cinquante-quatre ans' (*MTD*, p. 24) – recalls the argument at the

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evidence of this, but many of her other writings, fictional as well as autobiographical, suggest that this primary relationship is both a vital permanent thread in the texture of Beauvoir's mental life and too complex or fundamental to be tidily encapsulated in rigid formulas', in *Simone de Beauvoir: A Study of Her Writings* (London: Harrap, 1983), p. 61, cited in Patterson, op. cit., p. 217.

heart of *Le Deuxième sexe* and *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* that liberation for women can only come with financial independence. We learn that her mother had embarked on further education (for example, gaining a qualification that enabled her to work as a library assistant for the Red Cross), and that she had retaught herself how to ride a bicycle, a particularly resonant image suggesting independence and the freedom to circulate in the city (*MTD*, p. 24).

The phrase 'Avide de vivre enfin à sa guise' (*MTD*, pp. 24-25) is reminiscent of the narrator's depiction of her first steps towards independence in *La Force de l'âge*. In the latter, her 'avidité' became a *leitmotif* in both the description of excursions in and out of France and in her presentation of the 'pacte' with Sartre. In *Une mort très douce*, the mother's life, albeit at a much later stage in life and in response to changed circumstances, is also presented in terms of freedom and choice. Further points in common emerge: Mme de Beauvoir's love of books, languages and travel.[9] The love of travel especially inspires the narrator's admiration when her mother's physical frailty makes this more difficult.[10] Again, this is an aspect that reflects the defiant attitude of the narrator of *La Force de l'âge* and serves as reminder of the latter's refusal to acknowledge the embodied self as vulnerable entity in that text. This is a state of mind which is gradually tempered by personal and collective experiences (for example, of war, accidents and illness, ageing, relationships and the deaths of others). The narrator had described in these works, in particular *La Force des choses*, the feelings of alienation from her own body which forced her to reflect on her situated self as an entity not immune from illness or ageing, as earlier (and subsequent) depictions of an intellectualized self in the autobiographies would suggest. Likewise, depictions of 'avidité' in *Une mort très douce* are gradually countered by confrontations with illness and death.

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[9] 'Elle avait pu enfin satisfaire un de ses désirs les plus obstinés: voyager' (*MTD*, p. 25); 'Elle aimait manipuler les livres, les couvrir, les classer, tenir des fiches, donner des conseils aux lecteurs. Elle étudiait l'allemand, l'italien, entretenait son anglais' (*MTD*, p. 25). Trips to Vienna, Milan, Florence, Rome, Belgium, and Holland place an emphasis on her keen travelling habit.

[10] 'Ces derniers temps, presque paralysée, elle avait renoncé à courir le monde' (*MTD*, p. 25).

In this regard, the presentation of Mme de Beauvoir's fear of death and determination to live echoes the narrator's stance in earlier autobiographical volumes.[11] Empathy and identification between daughter and mother are suggested by the narrator's words: '[…] je me sentais solidaire de l'infirme clouée sur ce lit et qui luttait pour faire reculer la paralysie, la mort' (*MTD*, pp. 29-30). Even the inclusion of an image from the mother's nightmare – having to climb a wall with no knowledge of what is behind it – is reminiscent of the image of the 'barre noire' employed by the narrator in her earlier autobiographical texts to describe her visualization of ageing and the prospect of death. The narrator positions herself firmly on the side of the mother, a stance perhaps reinforced by the mother's rejection of religious practice towards the end of her life. This is a dramatic change of heart given Mme de Beauvoir's strict religious stance as presented in the *Mémoires*, and it brings her closer to her daughter's perspective since it erases a further difference between them (*MTD*, pp. 128-32). Finally, the words of Dylan Thomas in the epigraph, 'Do not go gentle into that good night. Old age should burn and rave at close of day; Rage, rage against the dying of the light', chime with the depiction of both the narrator and her mother's attitudes towards death ('Qu'on l'imagine céleste ou terrestre, l'immortalité, quand on tient à la vie, ne console pas de la mort' (*MTD*, p. 132)).

A desire even to deny the immediacy of death can be traced in a number of key images emphasizing the mother's vitality and beauty, and which are resuscitated in the text; these romanticized, almost disembodied portraits contrast with the stark images of her dying body. They also recall depictions of Zaza in the autobiographies. The mother is positioned in a timeless space as if to counter the inevitable passage of time towards death: 'Sa fin se situait, comme sa naissance, dans un temps mythique' (*MTD*, p. 27). In this achronological space she can be figured beyond time but not death: 'Ses souvenirs, ses idées, ses soucis flottaient hors du temps, transformés en rêves irréels et poignants par sa voix puérile et l'imminence de sa mort' (*MTD*, p. 65). Memories are recounted that place the emphasis on both the mother's physical and intellectual capacities:

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[11] 'Elle croyait au ciel; mais malgré son âge, ses infirmités, ses malaises, elle était farouchement accrochée à la terre et elle avait de la mort une horreur animale' (*MTD*, p. 19).

> [...] maman n'avait plus l'air d'une malade. Elle avait retrouvé l'usage de son bras gauche. Elle dépliait un journal, ouvrait un livre, décrochait le téléphone sans secours. [...] Elle faisait des mots croisés, elle lisait un ouvrage sur *Voltaire amoureux* et la chronique où Jean de Léry raconte son expédition au Brésil; elle feuilletait *Le Figaro*, *France-Soir* (*MTD*, p. 31).

Idealized portraits serve as reminder of the force of nostalgic recreations of figures from childhood and lost loved ones. In one reference, for example, the mother's face is compared to a Leonardo da Vinci drawing.[12] Such images function as an intellectual defence against death in this text, but the limitations of such an approach are recognized via the mother's experiences. This in turn leads to a tempering of the daughter's stance and to a less judgmental assessment of the mother's life.

Many will be familiar with the often moving, and sometimes disturbing, images of the mother's dying body – 'amaigrie et recroquevillée', less flesh and blood than skeletal, lifeless 'morceau de sarment rosâtre' (*MTD*, p. 34).[13] There is the death 'mask' of cancer, the reference to the 'visage de moribonde' (*MTD*, p. 37), and the 'cadavre vivant' (*MTD,* p. 103) – all these images suggest that the

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[12] 'Doucement, mademoiselle Leblon a défait sa natte et démêlé ses cheveux embroussaillés; elle les a tressés, elle a épinglé la torsade argentée autour de la tête de maman dont le visage détendu avait retrouvé une surprenante pureté. J'ai pensé à un dessin de Léonard de Vinci représentant une vieille femme très belle' (*MTD*, pp. 68-69).

[13] This is studied in detail by Fell, Miller, Marks, Hughes and Patterson. One could also note the way in which the mother's body is exposed in the text in a way that underlines the fact that it had inspired both reverence and revulsion: 'Voir le sexe de ma mère: ça m'avait fait un choc. Aucun corps n'existait moins pour moi – n'existait davantage. Enfant, je l'avais chéri; adolescente, il m'avait inspiré une repulsion inquiète; c'est classique; et je trouvai normal qu'il eût conservé ce double caractère répugnant et sacré: un tabou' (*MTD*, p. 27). In particular, it is the fact that her mother was seen to have given in to her body – rather than dominate it – that shocked the narrator: 'Seulement, ce corps, réduit soudain par cette démission à n'être qu'un corps, ne différait plus guère d'une dépouille: pauvre carcasse sans défense, palpée, manipulée par des mains professionnelles, où la vie ne semblait se prolonger que par une inertie stupide' (*MTD*, p. 27).

mother embodies death even in life, or is in between life and death.[14] Furthermore, the figure of the mother is invested with the power to petrify her daughter: 'J'ai poussé la porte et je me suis *figée* sur place' (*MTD*, p. 34) (my emphasis). Such encounters provoke the narrator's desire to distance herself from her mother since she embodies (more then a horror of death) the even more rebarbative process of dying. And yet the narrator does refer to involuntary identifications with her mother and to a recognition that her own management of her emotions is different in this case. She refers to a loss of control and a sense of alienation: 'Cette fois, mon désespoir échappait à mon contrôle: quelqu'un d'autre que moi pleurait en moi' (*MTD*, p. 43). An identification with the mother extends even to the point where, in a scene often studied by critics, the narrator suggests that she has taken on her mother's identity and becomes a cipher for her emotions:

> Je parlai à Sartre de la bouche de ma mère, telle que je l'avais vue le matin et de tout ce que j'y déchiffrais: une gloutonnerie refusée, une humilité presque servile, de l'espoir, de la détresse, une solitude – celle de sa mort, celle de sa vie – qui ne voulait pas s'avouer. Et ma propre bouche, m'a-t-il dit, ne m'obéissait plus: j'avais posé celle de maman sur mon visage et j'en imitais malgré moi les mimiques. Toute sa personne, toute son existence s'y matérialisaient et la compassion me déchirait (*MTD*, pp. 43-44).

This identification extends to a doubling of the 'sickly body' in the text in the sense that the narrator juxtaposes the mother's gradual succumbing to her body – 'Maintenant, son corps s'imposait à elle' (*MTD*, p. 83) – with her own body as an entity also vulnerable to illness: 'Je rentrai chez moi grippée, fiévreuse' (*MTD*, p. 66). As suggested earlier, such experiences provoke a reassessment of the mind/body binary (often presented in previous texts as a privileging of

[14] These abject images and the narrator's resistance to them recall Grosz's comments on the nature of abjection in conjunction with her analysis of Kristeva's theories. She comments: 'Abjection involves the paradoxically necessary but impossible desire to transcend corporeality. It is a refusal of the defiling, impure, uncontrollable materiality of a subject's embodied existence. It is a response to the various bodily cycles of incorporation, absorption, depletion, expulsion – a cyclical movement of rejuvenation and consumption', in *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1989), p. 72.

mind over matter within an existentialist framework.[15] This introjection of the mother's body is a further way in which the narrator manifests her changing stance towards her and to the situation of the individual in general. In the depictions of the mother, both physical and intellectual identifications point to a shift in the narrator's attitude towards this crucial relationship and, in a broader context, reveal her ongoing negotiations with existentialism.

Daughters, Mothers, and Sisters: Narrative Voices in *Une mort très douce*

The daughter's identification with her mother extends to a reassessment of the mother's life in a section of the text that is distinct from the past-tense narration of the mother's degeneration and death and which interrupts it. It slows the pace and provides a space for contemplation (with hindsight) by the narrator. This comes at the point when the mother is about to undergo major surgery and is prompted by her rapid degeneration and the narrator's admiration for her mother's defiant reaction to her illness. The narrator reads the mother's life through the lens of some of the central tenets of *Le Deuxième sexe*, and even the choice of phrases claimed to be uttered by Mme de Beauvoir are ones imbued with existentialist terminology: 'Une fois elle me déclara: "J'ai trop vécu pour les autres. Maintenant je vais devenir une de ces vieilles dames égoïstes qui ne vivent que pour elles-mêmes"' (*MTD*, p. 33). The existentialist imperative to live 'pour soi' is suggested by Mme de Beauvoir but is compounded nonetheless by the view that leading such a life would have been deemed by her in past times to have been selfish on her part.

In addition to identifying with the mother's 'avidité' in later life and her defiant attitude towards death, the narrator makes further connections to the *mother's*, as opposed to the daughter's, perspective. Such depictions suggest that Mme de Beauvoir no longer occupies the space of the vilified mother, necessary in the *Mémoires* to provide a pillar and victim of patriarchal society against whom the *jeune fille*

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[15] 'Je regardais les gens d'un œil neuf, obsédée par la tuyauterie compliquée qui se cachait sous leurs vêtements. Moi-même, parfois, je me changeais en une pompe aspirante et foulante ou en un système de poches et de boyaux' (*MTD*, p. 106).

rangée enacted her rebellion.[16] Rather, she is described as a woman who herself has followed in later life some of the existentialist precepts of her daughter and whose opportunities to exercize her freedom are recognized as having been limited by force of circumstance. In a manner very different from the *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, then, Mme de Beauvoir's life as 'jeune fille rangée' and then dutiful *mother* is filtered through the arguments of *Le Deuxième sexe* to the extent that her fate ('vécu contre elle-même', 'mutilée', 'étrangère à soi' (*MTD*, pp. 60-61) becomes a *mise en abyme* of her daughter's depiction of her own life as 'jeune fille rangée'. Bound by codes and conventions (*MTD*, p. 61), unwilling to recount an unhappy childhood or to discuss her own distant mother to her daughter,[17] the narrator describes the society in which her mother was unable to rebel. She includes references to her thwarted desires to become an explorer (*MTD*, p. 48), and contrasts them with the repetitious drudgery of her everyday existence and the constraints imposed on her as a mother by society (*MTD*, pp. 50-51). She also uses her mother's experiences to reinforce the critique of marriage presented in *Le Deuxième sexe.*[18] Furthermore, the relative absence of freedom and choice in the mother's life strikes an additional parallel with the figure of Zaza from the *Mémoires*. The mother has become another 'jeune fille rangée', depicted at one point in a pose strikingly similar to the depiction of the dead Zaza in the *Mémoires*:

> Je la revois un matin […] dans sa longue chemise de nuit en toile blanche; ses cheveux tombaient en torsade sur sa nuque et j'ai été saisie par le rayonnement de son sourire, lié pour moi d'une manière mystérieuse à cette chambre dont elle sortait; je reconnaissais à peine dans cette fraîche apparition la grande personne respectable qui était ma mère (*MTD*, pp. 47-48).

If the mother does not suffer the same fate as Zaza (death in youth), the image remains at odds with the depictions of her as mother and/or ageing woman. Both Zaza and the mother become fleeting, shadowy apparitions, both psychic alter egos, perhaps, to the narrator. The fact

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[16] For detailed analysis of this rebellion, see Corbin and Fell, op. cit.

[17] 'De son enfance à Verdun, elle ne m'a rien raconté' (*MTD*, p. 45).

[18] 'Que le mariage bourgeois soit une institution contre nature, son cas suffirait à m'en convaincre' (*MTD*, p. 51).

that the narrator no longer recognizes the image she describes in her mind's eye of her mother reinforces the presentation of the mother's life as a series of symbolic deaths of self, as suggested by the image above and the narrator's statement: 'Elle était capable de s'oublier, sans retour sur soi, pour mon père, pour nous' (p. 50).[19] The mother embodies many of the traits assigned to the divided self described in *Le Deuxième sexe*. However, Beauvoir's overall aim does not seem to be to judge her mother; rather, she laments the lost opportunities, and imagines how her mother's life might have been different if she had had greater freedom.[20] This is expressed through a hypothetical 'what if' commentary (*MTD*, p. 50), and also through references to the fact that her own stance as *jeune fille rangée* in revolt has changed.

We have seen that the use of different narrative perspectives in the text presents contrasting images of the mother. Firstly, she embodies death in life in the past-tense narration of events leading up to her death. However, in contrast, the commentary on her life, presented with the hindsight offered after her death, emphasizes her determination and vitality and sets up parallels with the narrator's stance. A paralysed relationship in life becomes, after the death of the mother, a renewed textual dialogue with her in a way which the narrator recognizes would never have happened when the mother was alive: '[…] je reprenais le dialogue brisé pendant mon adolescence et que nos divergences et notre ressemblance ne nous avaient jamais permis de renouer' (*MTD*, p. 109). A statement made in the early part of the past-tense narration by the narrator suggests that she controlled her emotions by rationalizing the imminent death of the mother ('Je m'émus peu. […]. Et, somme toute, elle avait l'âge de mourir' (*MTD*, p. 16)). The fact that she returns to this position (which is consistent with her views in the earlier autobiographical texts) to reconsider her stance later in the text, underlines the transition to a more empathetic stance.[21] She argues that she had not at that point realized how much her mother's death would affect her.

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[19] This is reinforced in the portrayal of the parents' marriage.

[20] 'Dans ses dernières années elle était parvenue à une certaine cohérence; mais à l'époque où sa vie affective était le plus tourmentée, elle n'avait ni doctrine, ni concepts, ni mots pour la rationaliser' (*MTD*, p. 60).

[21] Likewise the narrator states at one point: 'Je ne tenais pas particulièrement à revoir maman avant sa mort; mais je ne supportais pas l'idée qu'elle ne me reverrait pas.

Finally, it is also significant that the narrator's depictions of self and other are not restricted solely to the mother-daughter relationship. Her sister, Hélène, to whom the work is dedicated, is now depicted more as an ally than as a threat or Other to be dominated. This contrasts with her portrait in the *Mémoires*. Since the narrator did not witness the actual moment of her mother's death, a recreation in writing via the sister's experience is presented. Thus, an event from which the narrator was absent triggers a desire to get as close to the experience as possible by recreating it via Hélène's memories. This then sets up, via the sister, a further dialogue with death.

Dialogues with Death and the Dead: (Auto)biography as Reparation

Existentialist maxims highlighted in Beauvoir's fictional and autobiographical works (the Hegelian epigraph in *L'Invitée* – 'chacun poursuit la mort de l'autre', for example) are overshadowed in this work by reciprocal actions and the articulation of a desire for reparation. The exploration of the narrator's life through writing is imbricated in the mother's to the extent that the text is situated in between biography and autobiography,[22] and her mother's story becomes her own confrontation with mortality: 'Parfums, fourrures, lingeries, bijoux: luxueuse arrogance d'un monde où la mort n'a pas sa place; mais elle était tapie derrière cette façade, dans le secret grisâtre des cliniques, des hôpitaux, des chambres closes. Et je ne connaissais plus d'autre vérité' (*MTD*, p. 111).

Furthermore, the narrator's difficulties in confronting the body in its vulnerability are reminiscent of depictions of herself in earlier autobiographical works such as *La Force de l'âge* and *La Force des choses*: in those texts she describes a sense of alienation from her sick, injured or ageing body in a narrative of death that is juxtaposed with the narrative recounting the life as existentialist

Pourquoi accorder tant d'importance à un instant, puisqu'il n'y aura pas de mémoire? Il n'y aura pas non plus de réparation' (*MTD*, p. 88).

[22] 'Ma vraie vie se déroulait auprès d'elle et n'avait qu'un but: la protéger' (*MTD*, p. 103).

success story. Here, even the narrative spaces of mother and daughter echo each other: the enclosed space of the clinic in which the mother finds herself is mirrored by the confines of the narrator's apartment in which she awaits news. Such mirrorings, as suggested earlier, reveal the narrator's reassessment of this key relationship, now viewed from a perspective sharpened by the mother's degeneration and death, and which can be compared and contrasted with her portrait in the autobiographical texts.

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In *Une mort très douce*, the depiction of the mother's life blurs the boundaries between autobiography and biography (or indeed autothanatography and thanatography), in a manner that is echoed in *La Cérémonie des adieux*, the text that will follow. Both works depart from the emphasis on distancing and separation from the mother figure in the *Mémoires* and earlier autobiographical texts. Instead, they present often painful confrontations with ageing and death which testify to Beauvoir's heightened awareness of her own situated, embodied self. The narrator's dialogues with death and the dead in this work encompass a series of encounters with her mother that depict her life, her degeneration and her death. Rather than reading the text in terms of the enacting of a symbolic violence on the mother, this analysis has focused on the presence of narratives of reparation and interdependence that contrast with depictions of the mother and daughter in the autobiographical works proper.[23] Comments on death and mortality made by the author in previous texts can thus be reviewed in the light of her experiences of her mother's death. The writing of death as reparation now extends from the depiction of Zaza's death in the *Mémoires* via collective death in *La Force de l'âge* and *La Force des choses*, to the mother's death here. The presentation of an unequal, fairly distant relationship is tempered by the reassessment of the mother's life and death in a valedictory text in which previous statements uttered in the autobiographical works are reviewed in the light of experiences in later life and by the narrator's desire (which runs through all the autobiographical volumes) to present an honest and authentic account of them.

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[23] 'Elle dépendait matériellement de moi; elle ne prenait aucune décision pratique sans me consulter: j'étais le soutien de famille, en quelque sorte son fils. D'autre part j'étais un écrivain connu' (*MTD*, p. 96).

Thus, the depiction of concrete confrontations with the mother's dying body reveals Beauvoir's ongoing negotiations with existentialism and contrasts with images of the mother as a disembodied figure beyond death who is both death-dealing and life-affirming in the impact she has on her daughter. Narratives which emphasize the materiality of existence are juxtaposed with memories of past selves and fantasies of future incarnations. Writing and words recur as a unifying *leitmotif*: they serve as the 'mask' against death and dying for the daughter in a text which reveals the constant interplay between the threat of annihilation by the mother figure and desire for symbiosis between mother and daughter. Where dialogue in reality with the mother is paralysed, the text presents an attempt by the narrator, after the mother's death, to recreate a less antagonistic, shared textual vision.

CHAPTER VI

La Cérémonie des adieux

Soon after publication of *La Cérémonie des adieux*, Poirot-Delpech wrote in a review in *Le monde* that Simone de Beauvoir had refused to engage in the retelling of a love story.[1] Others launched attacks on the writer (as they had done after publication of *Une mort très douce*) for having overstepped the mark in her depiction of an ageing, dying man with respect to what constitutes material acceptable for public consumption, asking whether the representation of an abjected body constitutes an act of symbolic violence.[2] Informed by psychoanalysis, Jardine has interpreted Beauvoir's depiction of Sartre's physical and mental degeneration over a ten-year period which culminates in his death in terms of an ultimate phallic mother whose existence menaces her own sense of identity and who has to be destroyed.[3] Yet Marks returns to the question of the norms which govern the choice of subject matter itself, arguing that, '[F]or aging and dying, when presented referentially, are taboo topics within phallocentric discourse: it is permissible to write about the sexual practices of a famous man; it is not permissible to write about his loss of control over his excretory functions'.[4] She also focuses on the erasure of the material female body in critiques predicated on 'the death of the author, the death of the referent', arguing that such critiques, 'for all their seductive subtlety [they] may also be a means of obliterating once again women, sexuality, old age, dying, and death'.[5]

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[1] He writes, 'Elle s'interdit de raconter l'amour Sartre-Beauvoir', in '*La Cérémonie des adieux*, de Simone de Beauvoir', *Le monde*, 25 novembre 1981, p. 1, p. 11.

[2] Marks explores reception of the text in terms of trangressing taboos in 'Transgressing the (In)cont(in)ent Boundaries: The Body in Decline', *Yale French Studies*, 72 (1986), pp. 181-200, as does Idt in '*La Cérémonie des adieux de Simone de Beauvoir*: rite funéraire et défi littéraire', *Revue des sciences humaines*, 192 (1983), 15-33. See also Hughes's discussion of *Une mort très douce* in *Heterographies: Sexual Difference in French Autobiography* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), pp. 119-27.

[3] In 'Death Sentences: Writing Couples and Ideology', *Poetics Today*, 6, 1-2 (1985), 119-31.

[4] 'Transgressing the (In)cont(in)ent Boundaries: The Body in Decline', p. 187.

[5] Ibid., p. 187. See also p. 200.

Aligning myself with Marks' emphasis on the ways in which *La Cérémonie des adieux* challenges norms of acceptability in terms of genre and content, I would like to re-examine depictions of Sartre to highlight the multiple and sometimes conflicting representations of him, whether as writer, as ageing body, as alter ego, or as mentor, in order to trace Beauvoir's negotiations of death and mortality via the Other in this text.[6] Her avowed role in the preface of *La Cérémonie des adieux* is that of an 'exécuteur testamentaire' and her writing about the death of an Other reveals her relationship to alterity, in terms of both death and the other as 'unknowns'.

Does it make a difference that the narrator is female and her 'Other' male? As noted in the introduction, Bronfen's study of representations of death in art and literature provides ample evidence of the ways in which femininity and death are often 'ascribed the position of alterity', in an analysis which echoes Beauvoir's emphasis on the cultural construction of 'Woman', positioned always in opposition to the male subject.[7] In this respect the latter's exploration of constructions and deconstructions of *masculinity* and death already diverges from the traditional model.

In addition, in focusing here on the extent to which the depictions of Sartre in *La Cérémonie des adieux* inform the construction of the author's identity and positionings, a caveat looms for analysis which encompasses references to the lived experiences of individuals and depictions of them as textual characters.[8] Without wishing to ignore Miller's reminder that intertextuality is in danger of

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[6] For a comparison of Beauvoir's and Doubrovsky's depiction of Sartre, see my '*La Cérémonie des adieux* and *Le Livre brisé*: Situating Sartre in the Text', *Modern Language Review*, 97, 4 (October 2002), 835-849.

[7] *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (NY: Routledge, 1992), p. xiii. Bronfen discusses the paradox inherent in representations of death: '[…] "death" is always culturally constructed, since outside any speaking subject's personal experience, outside and beyond the imaginary and symbolic registers' (p. 54). It is a signifier with an 'ungraspable signified'; yet at the same time, she argues, 'It is the one privileged moment of the absolutely real, of true, non-semiotic materiality as de-materializing or de-materialized body; it is a failure of the tropic' (p. 54).

[8] Jefferson explores the intertextual relations between autobiography and fiction in 'Autobiography as intertext: Barthes, Sarraute, Robbe-Grillet' in *Intertextuality: Theories and practices*, ed. by Michael Worton and Judith Still (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1990), pp. 108-29 (p. 109, p. 127).

effacing the woman writer by arguing for 'de-authored textuality',[9] it is the crossover between the referential and the metaphorical in this hybrid text which, I would argue, makes its status so ambiguous, uncertain and thought-provoking. Indeed, Marks reminds us that ageing, declining or dead bodies 'have no place in contemporary fictional and autobiographical texts read by poststructuralist, psychoanalytic critics because the apparent "story" is always secondary'.[10] Her exploration of the taboo associated with depicting the abject body forms the core of her analysis. Here, it is the relationship between the fantasized body and the materiality of the dying body which will be shown to complicate readings of the text.

Situating Sartre in the Text: Love Story or Symbolic Violence?

In *La Cérémonie des adieux*, the portrayal of Sartre need not be reduced to one which focuses on him either in terms of a degrading portrait whose purpose is humiliation, or in terms of the playing out of a Freudian scenario. Viewed as a taboo-breaking, but also at times empathetic, study of ageing, *La Cérémonie des adieux* mirrors some of the preoccupations raised in *La Force des choses* but which relate less specifically to a mid-life crisis than to a confrontation with mortality by an ageing and increasingly fragile self.[11] The discourse of abjection evident in *La Force des choses*, which is overshadowed to a certain extent in the intellectualized portrait of self in *Tout compte fait,* regains centre stage in *La Cérémonie des adieux*. Here, the author emphasizes above all a desexualization of identity in which her own experiences of ageing mirror those of Sartre and at the same time also complicate interpretations focusing primarily on him as abject Other, as both figures are confronted with the reality of their 'situated' selves.

Firstly, the structure of *La Cérémonie des adieux* offsets readings of Sartre as abject Other and counterbalances the portrayal of

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[9] In *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (NY: Columbia UP, 1988), p. 83, and noted by Allen, in *Intertextuality* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 158.

[10] Marks, op.cit., p. 189.

[11] Holmes makes the distinction between representations of 'the signs of ageing in a healthy middle-aged body' in *La Force des choses*, 'radically desexualizing for women, insignificant for men – and the final material decline of the body towards death', in 'Colette, Beauvoir and the Change of Life', *French Studies*, 53, 4 (1999), 430-43 (p. 443).

his degeneration and death.[12] Although the author tells us that this is the only text written by her that Sartre will not have seen, he is still addressed directly – explicitly in the preface, and implicitly in the conclusion. The seeking of approval from her readers for her decision not to tell Sartre about the gravity of his condition via direct questioning also seems to extend and call out for a response from the Sartre she implicates as 'vous' in the preface. In this way, such structuring features appear to be part of an ongoing textual dialogue in defiance of mortality, and which reinforce the writer's role as mentor and friend.[13]

Secondly, the different portrayals of Sartre disclose the author's uncertainty about which Sartre she will be dealing with. These present his fluctuating state-of-mind as a source of anxiety: '[…] je me sentais angoissée: je ne savais pas quel Sartre j'allais retrouver' (*CA*, p. 66). Inspired by empathy (as opposed to envy, a desire for revenge, or an 'anxiety of influence') a number of scenes depict illness and death, and are mentioned by Tidd in her study as occasions for solidarity *with* the Other.[14] They offer moments when the narrator identifies with an ageing Sartre, and, importantly, comes to recognize her own situated and embodied self: '[…] je voguais comme lui entre la crainte et l'espoir' (*CA*, p. 176). However, if these representations are empathetic, they still present a rather bleak identification with the Other, resigned to life in old age (unlike the depictions in *La Vieillesse*, for example, which include discussion of the benefits of 'sagesse').

Negotiations of Death and Mortality via the Abject Other: Double Discourses

Some argue that it is a feminized, emasculated Sartre who is the object of the reader's attention in the text.[15] Traits traditionally associated with femininity (and explored in *Le Deuxième sexe* as examples of

[12] Tidd rightly emphasizes how Beauvoir 'addresses the abject Otherness of intersubjective relations', in *Simone de Beauvoir: Gender and Testimony* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), p. 174.

[13] One could also argue that the inclusion of the author's interviews with Sartre preserves his voice and presence in the text.

[14] *Simone de Beauvoir: Gender and Testimony*, p. 159, p. 163, p. 174.

[15] See Jardine, op. cit., pp. 128-29.

social conditioning) such as modesty, passivity and resignation, are associated with him: 'J'ai été émue par sa simplicité, par cette modestie si neuve chez lui; et en même temps j'étais peinée par son manque d'agressivité, par sa résignation' (*CA*, p. 54); 'comme il me semblait vulnérable!' (*CA*, p. 67). The exploration in *Le Deuxième sexe* of the ways in which the binary subject/other places women in the position of other finds an echo in Sartre's apprehension of himself as an object – '[…] il avait l'impression d'être un objet, sans rapport avec les gens' (*CA*, p. 69) – as well as his horror of the body, ageing and death, and his anxiety about the future: 'Evidemment, il souffrait d'une inquiétude diffuse par rapport à son corps, à son âge, à la mort' (*CA*, p. 69). If few references actually identify Sartre explicitly with the feminine, his masculinity is consistently undermined by descriptions of him and by his own pronouncements in the interviews in the same volume. When asked about his reluctance to identify himself as an 'adulte mâle', he replied: 'Je ne suis même plus un adulte, je suis du troisième âge, et si je suis encore mâle, c'est fort peu' (*CA*, p. 405). In identifying with Sartre's condition, the narrator recognizes her own situated and embodied (if desexualized) self, implicating herself, for example, in Pierre Victor's labelling of the editorial members of *Les Temps modernes* in a fit of anger as 'tous des morts' (*CA*, p. 154). Again and again the inescapable reality of the ageing body is brought to the fore.

However, other images in the text complicate this identification with an ageing, desexualized Sartre. In contrast to the largely chronological descriptions and enumeration of the day-to-day contingency of life, of ailing and infirm, incontinent bodies, a number of timeless symbolic spaces stand out from the daily descriptions. These time-defying textual 'edifices' do not promote life in old age but are ones in which the situated self is elided, if momentarily, and where images of younger selves are recreated in the text or are projected onto a younger ally (such as Pierre Victor).[16] These 'espaces

[16] Beauvoir presents Sartre's relationship with Pierre Victor (aka Benny Lévy) in terms of existentialist transcendence. Sartre, seeing his own life nearing its close, can live vicariously through Victor, whose projects and status as intellectual are viewed as having been shaped by the influence of Sartre: 'Sartre avait toujours vécu tendu vers l'avenir: il ne pouvait pas vivre autrement. Réduit au présent, il se considérait comme mort. Agé, menacé dans son corps, à demi aveugle, l'avenir était barré pour lui. Il a eu

refuges' offer moments in which the ageing, abject body is forgotten or transcended, replaced by the image of a younger self looking to the future. They are spaces reminiscent of narratives in earlier volumes of the autobiography in which an existentialist discourse pervaded depictions of the self and the life of the writer. Subjectivity is presented in an atemporal space which, in contrast with other trios and partnerships in the text, effaces present and future to retrieve an intellectual and youthful partnership for posterity.

One such 'espace refuge' is 'La Coupole'. The narrator describes a nostalgic moment in the famous brasserie in Paris when Sartre sees a young woman who reminds him of a younger Beauvoir:

> Et j'ai été émue aussi quand, déjeunant avec moi à La Coupole, il m'a montré une jeune fille brune aux yeux bleus, au visage un peu rond, et m'a demandé: « Savez-vous à qui elle me fait penser? – Non. – A vous quand vous aviez son âge. » (*CA*, p. 34).

Memories of her physical appearance clash with the reminder that their material existence has changed: 'Une seule chose clochait: sa main droite restait faible' (*CA*, p. 34). On the following page, 'La Coupole' is mentioned again, and in this scene the phrase 'La Cérémonie des adieux' appears; it is the moment when Beauvoir has to say her farewells to Sartre, and it anticipates his death as final 'adieu':

> Cette fois-là j'ai déjeuné avec lui à La Coupole, où Sylvie devait venir me chercher à quatre heures. […] Il a souri d'une manière indéfinissable et il m'a dit: « Alors, c'est la cérémonie des adieux! » Je lui ai touché l'épaule sans répondre. Le sourire, la phrase m'ont poursuivie longtemps. Je donnais au mot « adieux » le sens suprême qu'il a eu quelques années plus tard: mais alors j'ai été seule à le prononcer (*CA*, p. 35).

The scenes at 'La Coupole' offer a momentary glimpse of their past partnership and the mention of 'la cérémonie des adieux' suggests their fate in microcosm: the nostalgic nod to the past in the young girl

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recours à un ersatz: militant et philosophe, Victor réaliserait le « nouvel intellectuel » dont Sartre rêvait et qu'il aurait contribué à faire exister' (*CA*, pp. 166-67).

who resembles Beauvoir; an acceptance of fragility in the hand which now trembles; the farewells before they go to Italy anticipating the final farewell – a moment when relationships with others are forgotten. In Rome, a city which they visited every summer, an equivalent to this Parisian space is recreated in the references to the Place Trastavere. In the revisited spaces of Rome, the depiction of Sartre now privileges the recreation of a former self: 'En juin, Sartre était parfois un peu distrait, un peu absent: à Rome, plus du tout. Nous occupions toujours cet appartement-terrasse qui nous enchantait. Et, comme toujours, nous causions, nous lisions, nous écoutions de la musique' (*CA*, p. 53). Returning to a familiar place creates a timelessness in which his ageing and fragile body can be transcended, if momentarily.

These symbolic spaces contrast with the very specific chronological documentation of day-to-day events presented in a diary-style format. Yet it is not only particular locations which function in this way. Film offers another space onto which the self can be viewed and reviewed, and where an image can be preserved for posterity. The narrator describes how astonished she is to see such little difference between an image projected on the screen and the man sitting beside her: '[…] tel il apparaissait sur l'écran, tel était-il aussi dans la vie […]' (*CA*, p. 55). These moments are described as rather disconcerting 'résurrections' in which a newly rejuvenated Sartre emerges,[17] and whose integrity of self is preserved in an image of resistance to embodiment: 'Il y avait en lui un fonds de santé physique et morale qui a résisté, jusqu'à ses dernières heures, à toutes les atteintes' (*CA*, p. 56).

Furthermore, as is the case in the autobiographical volumes, their long-term partnership as fellow writers and intellectuals is re-inscribed and reinforced in the text through the use of the collective 'nous'. The last line of *La Cérémonie des adieux* celebrates the length of time that their lives have been intertwined – 'Sa mort nous sépare. Ma mort ne nous réunira pas. C'est ainsi; il est déjà beau que nos vies

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[17] 'Ce qu'il y a eu d'extraordinaire chez Sartre et de déconcertant pour son entourage, c'est que, du fond des abîmes où on le croyait à jamais enlisé, il resurgissait, allègre, intact' (*CA*, p. 55).

aient pu si longtemps s'accorder' (*CA*, p. 176) – and the last line uttered by Sartre in the interviews reinforces a unity of vision through the insistence on an all-encompassing 'nous' voice: 'Et nous avons quand même vécu, nous avons l'impression de nous être intéressés à notre monde, d'avoir essayé de le voir' (*CA*, p. 625).

Depictions of Sartre not only draw attention to myths about femininity and masculinity as cultural constructions; they are also caught, in the juxtaposition of ahistorical and chronological narratives, between the discourse of abjection which brings the material, ageing body into the text and an existentialist framework which elides confrontations with embodiment. This has the effect that numerous images of Sartre are presented in the text, from his public persona as writer to the reality of his dying self. The symbolic spaces recreate for posterity a lasting image of the Sartre-Beauvoir partnership which contrasts with the discourse of ageing. A 'double discourse' seems apparent here; oscillating between writing the body and transcending the ageing self, the narrator empathizes with Sartre's predicament and reveals the competing influences on her own writing project. The text could be viewed less as a final bid for freedom from the influence of Sartre than as a move to confirm the author's affiliation to him, by re-establishing identifications both in terms of his philosophical legacy and his embodied experience. Thus, the writing of Sartre's death becomes intertwined with Beauvoir's coming to terms with her own situated, ageing self and her politicization of that experience.

Writing for Posterity

For Simone de Beauvoir, writing about the death of loved ones offers a means to explore the self, and also to reconcile the self to death. As noted earlier, in her conclusion to *La Cérémonie des adieux* the narrator writes: 'Sa mort nous sépare. Ma mort ne nous réunira pas' (*CA*, p. 176). Through the writing process, she transgresses taboos by writing about the brutal, often unpalatable reality of the dying and dead body; however, her exploration of desexualized and abjected bodies is also part of a gesture towards and identification with the Other.

The narrator's affiliative gestures to the Other shape her own sense of self *via* these confrontations with death. This departs from intertextual interpretations based on, for example, Bloom's essay *The Anxiety of Influence*, and Martha Noël Evans's feminist response to it in *Masks of Tradition: Women and the Politics of Writing in 20th Century France*.[18] In *The Anxiety of Influence*, Bloom argues that writers find themselves in a situation where they are oppressed by anxiety because of writers who have gone before them, and in anticipation of those who will follow them. Growing up in their predecessor's shadow as rivals, they cannot help but be influenced by that relationship, which creates emotions as diverse as love and admiration, envy and fear. As Barry puts it, Bloom 'sees the struggle for identity by each generation of poets, under the "threat" of the greatness of its predecessors, as an enactment of the Oedipus complex'.[19] Certainly, Jardine's focus on the annihilation of '*The Father* for intellectual France' by Beauvoir in her interpretation of *La Cérémonie* would seem to lend itself to this type of reading.[20]

However, identifying the annihilation of mother and father figures within an œdipal framework has not been the only way in which to read the text. Evans replaces Bloom's reading of 'the writer's need to establish his autonomy over and against the writers who preceded him' with alternative models of literary identity and identification.[21] She posits that for the women authors in her study, personal autonomy is 'envisioned as embedded in, rather than separate from, a network of relationships [...]'.[22] Bloom's framework does not explain why, in addition to the desire to enact symbolic violence upon

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[18] *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1973); *Masks of Tradition: Women and the Politics of Writing in 20th Century France* (New York: Cornell UP, 1987). Wilson refers to Bloom's and other critics' discourse in terms of 'a machismo of interpretation', in *Sexuality and the Reading Encounter: Identity and Desire in Proust, Duras, Tournier and Cixous* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 25-26.

[19] *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995), p. 105.

[20] Jardine, op. cit., p. 122.

[21] *Masks of Tradition*, op. cit., p. 21. See also Allen's lucid critique of Bloom's theory in 'Situated readers: Bloom, feminism, postcolonialism', in *Intertextuality*, op. cit., pp. 133-73.

[22] *Masks of Tradition*, p. 22.

the Other, identification with significant others and perception of the self via the other's perspective, is an integral part of the author's autobiographical project. The fact that Beauvoir challenges social and cultural codes in her choice of subject matter and style of writing, and engages with different ideological frameworks, also elides Bloom's theory, which, argues Allen, 'refuses to accept social and cultural contexts as relevant intertextual fields of meaning for literary texts'.[23] No ready-made literary models present themselves for Beauvoir; in this respect, she confirms the 'anxiety of authorship' framework established by Gilbert and Gubar where women writers have few female role models to identify with or rebel against.[24]

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Both *Une mort très douce* and *La Cérémonie des adieux* reveal prevailing attitudes about the taboos concerning writing about bodies and death. Existentialist perspectives offer a means to control or erase the excesses of the ageing body in the text, but slippage from this framework reveals the reality of death and the difficulties of negotiating it in writing.

Rereading the Sartre intertext from a thanatographical perspective in this hybrid, fragmented text brings to the fore the relationship between writing drive, gender, self and other. Confrontations with the real, material body noted by Marks seem to function as a disordering principle in the narrative in a way which reinforces the presentation of an existential split of Sartre's mind and body. These confrontations contrast with Beauvoir's existentialist project of transcendence, highlighted here through analysis of the 'espaces refuges' and through the structuring of a collective 'nous' that reinforces the Beauvoir-Sartre partnership. Writing from the perspective of not-self breaks the auto*bio*graphical cycle, revealing

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[23] *Intertextuality*, op. cit., p. 140.

[24] The roots of Gilbert and Gubar's 'anxiety of authorship' are found in the absence of and desire for a tradition of women writers to create a canon of pre-texts. This approach is discussed by Allen in *Intertextuality*, op. cit., p. 145. Williams also discusses Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman In the Attic*, in the light of Bloom's theory, in her article 'Happy Families? Feminist Reproduction and Matrilinear Thought', in *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), first published 1986, ed. by Mary Eagleton, pp. 52-56 (p. 55).

death as the ultimate signifier. If writers can never do justice to death, its creative potential as a writing drive still provides a space in which alterity can be explored. In *La Cérémonie*, Beauvoir voices herself, not as the *voix d'outre-tombe* who presented a totalization of a life in *Tout compte fait*, but in relation to the degeneration and death of an Other and in a way which highlights competing narratives of transcendence and embodiment via negotiations of a 'situated self'. Thus, in common with *Une mort très douce*, she brings the theoretical insights of *Le Deuxième sexe* on self, other and situation in line with her writing practice.

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'"Mourir ne se décline pas" […]. It is a defective verb that cannot be conjugated, for it has no forms in the present tense, nor can any personal pronoun serve as its subject'.[1]

Conclusion

The writing of autobiography as desire to preserve the self for posterity in the face of death certainly places Beauvoir within a well-established canon: this includes figures such as Montaigne who philosophizes the prospect of death in his *Essais*, and Stendhal, whose decision to write *La Vie de Henry Brulard* is fuelled by his realization that he will soon be fifty years old, not to mention the numerous autobiographical and autofictional works to have been published in the 20th and 21st centuries that engage specifically with the prospect of death.[2] Existential crises, the deaths of family members and significant 'others', and life-threatening situations have all fuelled the development of autobiography as creative manifestation of a death-drive.[3]

My aim in this study has been to demonstrate that the death drive in autobiographical writing, understood as a desire to restore an earlier state of things and to create a totalizing vision of life, with the desire for death as a desire for totality, is brought to the fore in Beauvoir's autobiographies. In the process, the relationship of women to death, a realm which has thus far not been explored in depth in autobiography studies, has also been broached. The four volumes of

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[1] John Gregg citing Blanchot (*Le Pas au-delà,* p. 147), in *Maurice Blanchot and the Literature of Transgression* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994), p. 44.

[2] See *La Vie de Henry Brulard* (Paris: Divan, 1927), p. 3, and Montaigne's *Essais*, in *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Pléiade, 1962). Autobiographical and autofictional texts by Chawaf, Doubrovsky, Duras, Guibert, Leiris, Perec, Sarraute, Semprun, and Simon, amongst others, present themselves as texts that engage with *thanatos* as much as *bios*. See also the emergence of AIDS testimonials and concentration camp testimonials cf. Hughes, *Heterographies: Sexual Difference in French Autobiography* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), pp. 105-119, for discussion of the former and *Entre-deux-morts*, sous la direction de Juliette Vion-Dury, préface de Daniel Sibony (Limoges: PULIM, 2000), for the latter.

[3] Whitford highlighted the death drive as both destructive and creative potential in the context of Irigaray's writing, in 'Irigaray, Utopia, and the Death Drive', in *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, ed. by C. Burke, N. Schor and M. Whitford (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), pp. 379-400 (pp. 394-95).

Beauvoir's autobiographical *œuvre* and two volumes of (auto)biography reveal the complexities of Beauvoir's writing of self, analysed through the lens of her literary and philosophical explorations of death. For instance, it is Zaza, as significant Other, rather than family relation, who acts as existential 'trigger' in fuelling the writing drive. The presentation of *La Force de l'âge* as a fracturing text provides evidence of the death-drive as disintegration, with the bulimic writing style of *La Force des choses* representing Beauvoir's writing as bulwark against physical degeneration and *petrification* of the passage of time towards death. In *Tout compte fait*, preserving a life and self as 'totality' for posterity stands as manifestation of Beauvoir's particular writing drive. In this respect *autothanatography* has emerged as viable alternative to dealing with the 'existentializing' problems that become apparent in the autobiographies. However, biography as *thanatography* also finds expression in *Une mort très douce* and *La Cérémonie des adieux* when the deaths of significant 'Others' are the focus.

Beauvoir as philosopher has informed this study and the autobiographies have provided a valuable means to examine existentialism and to question its validity as framework for the woman autobiographer. Writing the self in terms of a committed act, and as a means to liberate the self, has been analysed in conjunction with questions of women's liberation, the gendered body and representations of women's sexuality through the non-maternal lens. Reading the four volumes chronologically, from *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* to *Tout compte fait*, as depiction of the progression of a life forwards in the existentialist or feminist mould, can be compared and contrasted with autothanatographical perspectives. This allows certain assumptions in traditional autobiography (both male and female) to be challenged. The two (auto)biographical volumes have also provided points of comparison in the ways in which they bring to the fore the oscillation between existentialist frameworks and negotiations with death. The first of these assumptions to be challenged is the notion of *liberté*, as the crisis in the existentialist framework in *La Force de l'âge* and *La Force des choses* reveals.

If *liberté* initially appeared as overriding goal and *leitmotif* of the autobiographies as existentialist, feminist and political success story, I have argued that this stance is tempered by the increasing

constraints on Beauvoir's personal freedom. Contrasting narratives include her portrayal of freedom as a student breaking away from a bourgeois background in *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, but, in her reassessment, at the price of Zaza's death. Her freedom with Sartre to explore the world as 'existentialist' couple, but only as Other within the 'nous' narrative stance, then contrasts with her own paradoxical freedom to write within the restrictions of the Occupation in *La Force de l'âge*. Thirdly, her acceptance of her own limitations, combined with her perception of the increasing restraints imposed by the reality of the self as ageing, female body in *La Force des choses* departs from the image presented thus far of the Goncourt prize winner and public figure. In *Tout compte fait* there is a realization that with success comes an absence of freedom insofar as the image of the woman writer becomes public property. Thus the financial freedom offered by success is countered by an encroachment on personal space. Finally, her focus on the lives (and deaths) of her mother and Sartre exposes their circumvented freedom and the reality of the embodied, material self. The expectations of the public alter perceptions of what is expected of the author, limiting the freedom even to write.[4] This calls into question the very value systems which promote the notion of public 'success'. In this context, the desire to preserve a private space for the self contrasts with Jelinek's theorizing of women's autobiography in which the private sphere, traditionally associated with women, is brought into the public sphere. My study has attempted to rethink such binaries by exposing the overlap and nuances between public and private, intellectual and embodied, masculine and feminine, and the difficulties that 'existentializing' strategies present.

The second assumption to be questioned is the role of the 'body in writing' and 'the writing body'; these have proved revealing when analysing the autobiographical project. Is there a precise

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[4] This predicament was highlighted by Miller: '[…] while for all autobiographers already figures of public fiction there is a strong sense of responsibility about speaking out, because being known, they expect their words to have an impact within a clearly defined reader's circle, the female autobiographers know that they are being read as *women*', in 'Women's Autobiography in France: For a Dialectics of Identification', in *Women and Language in Literature and Society*, edited by S. McConnell-Ginet, R. Borker, and N. Furman (New York: Praeger, 1980), pp. 258-73 (p. 262).

relationship between the woman writer, the female body and death, which can be drawn from Beauvoir's writing? Fear of the feminine as *être en-soi* fuels the drive for transcendence via the writer as universal *être pour-soi*. Beauvoir's distancing of herself from the position of immanence contrasts with her slippages into immanence at the moments when she identifies with female 'others', or when she perceives herself as embodied Other. This perpetual oscillation between identification with the female, and distancing from it, perhaps best characterizes the relationship between death and self-expression as *gendered* subject in Beauvoir's œuvre. In addition, the representation of sexuality is also challenged, as the narrator's intellectualizing of her sexuality is evident in her representation of the Beauvoir-Sartre relationship, and also in her emphasis in *Tout compte fait* on her legacy as written *œuvre*, and through which the filial relationship with Sylvie Le Bon is presented. The fact that the autobiographies favour a portrayal of the intellectual first and foremost, and then the intellectual as woman writer, underlines the difficulties which have prevailed for women to be accepted within literary canons. Beauvoir's favouring of the mind over the body, and faith in the supremacy of the mind have thus been highlighted within this particular context.[5]

The exploration of innovation of genre in this study brings into question Lejeune's 'pacte autobiographique' to define the autobiographies; it could be argued that the narrator's pacts extend beyond 'author, narrator and character', and 'author and reader'. Firstly, the narrator establishes 'pacts' with others, by writing via their lives: in this respect, Zaza, Sartre, and Sylvie Le Bon have all been shown to play key roles in the texts. Zaza as alter ego allows Beauvoir to explore death via her 'ghostwriting' from the point of view of mirror 'jeune fille rangée' in *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*. Sartre as 'intellectual twin' enables the narrator to employ a unifying 'nous' narrative voice as 'public' existentialist and 'social critic' in *La Force de l'âge* and *La Force des choses*. Sylvie offers the writer a new mode of identification in *Tout compte fait*, which links the older

[5] Fallaize also suggests that 'the question should also be posed of whether Beauvoir was not right to fear that if she did not take care to place her work in this specifically male tradition, it would be much more difficult to get it taken seriously', in 'Narrative strategies and sexual politics in Beauvoir's fiction', *Simone de Beauvoir: A Critical Reader*, ed. by E. Fallaize (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 193-202 (p. 198).

narrator with a younger future, and guarantees a certain preservation and perpetuation of the narrator as *voix d'outre tombe*. Finally, writing about the deaths of others as their 'exécuteur testamentaire' sets up an explicit pact in which the lives and deaths of both narrator and narratee are implicated. Or, as Marin observes in his study of 'le motif testamentaire', the narrative voice '*se monumentalise*, devient monument fondateur comme le tombeau d'une voix manquante'.[6]

Secondly, and also problematizing the Lejeunian pact of identity, it is possible to trace moments when we witness the *death* of the female narrative voice, where 'on' or 'nous' implies an ungendered 'universal' self that is more dominant than the subject position of the woman writer. This is evident in the ways in which the first-person narrative voice is overshadowed by others (in *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, for example), or dissolved in a fantasized loss of self in the present, as in *La Force de l'âge*, or erased by the weight of narration of contingent events, as is most obvious in *La Force des choses*, or finally *disembodied*, as portrayed in *Tout compte fait*.

As far as narrative style is concerned, Beauvoir's use of the distanced, third-person essay mode still places her within traditional parameters; her use of canonical intertexts, as key strategy in *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, also confirms her traditional literary inheritance. Her ambiguous and often reluctant stance as woman writer problematizes feminist readings which would focus on the autobiographies as revelation of the 'private' self. The inextricable intersections of public and personal effectively cloud such delineations and risk reducing the importance of Beauvoir's *public* presentation of self. I have argued that autothanatography best defines her particular relationship to the genre; thanatographical readings of the author's particular generic strategies still allow them to be measured against earlier canonical models and anti-models, but they widen the critical focus. Within this framework the literary intertexts can be viewed as *voix d'outre-tombe* and the wide use of different genres, such as the *journal intime*, travelogue, and political documentary through which Beauvoir's different positionings of self

[6] Louis Marin, *L'Écriture de soi: Ignace de Loyola, Montaigne, Stendhal, Roland Barthes* (Paris: PUF, 1999), pp. 139-40.

are articulated, can be shown as evidence of the various means by which the narrator seeks to express herself.

Beauvoir borrows from the writings of her forefathers *and* mothers in *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*. She explores the overlap of autobiography and biography in her writing of the memoirs of others, and also broadens the genre into *Bildungsroman* and 'récit d'enfance'. I have argued that through such genre experimentation, the desire for a petrification or erasure of self, the desire for a physical transcending of self, and the desire to write as collective 'nous', can all be fulfilled. Writing via the lives and deaths of others, such as Zaza, Jacques, Sartre, her mother and Sylvie Le Bon, provides an alternative mode of expression. Borrowing from these varied genres encompasses both 'masculine' and 'feminine' categories of writing, as traditionally defined, suggesting again that a reading of the text as 'auto*gyn*ography' is less pertinent for Beauvoir's *œuvre*. This is further reinforced by the fact that Beauvoir's identifications span both 'male' and 'female' death, as explored via discussion of family members, friends and public figures in her works.

In *Tout compte fait* the essay mode of the intellectual is represented in the autobiographer's structuring of narrative 'edifices' in the text and in the ordering of her affairs in a volume where autobiography becomes *testament*. More generally, *Tout compte fait* functions as a pivotal text and starting point of the autothanatography within which the three previous volumes are *petrified* in time.[7] This might appear to signal the end of the autobiographical project, the impossibility of completing a life in its entirety posing a challenge to the author as far as the ending is concerned. We can view the accumulative strategy of the writer to amass words on the page as an attempt to defer the moment of death, by deferring the ending. The writing of *Tout compte fait* as *testament* effectively ends the cycle, at least temporarily, by imposing a willed end to a corpus of explorations

[7] Freeman suggests that we view the autobiographical enterprise as circular, citing Ricoeur: 'By reading the end into the beginning and the beginning into the end, we learn to read time backward, as the recapitulation of the initial conditions of a course of actions in its terminal consequences', in 'Narrative Time', in *On Narrative*, ed. by W. J. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 179, in Mark Freeman, *Rewriting the Self: History, Memory, Narrative* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 108.

of self in time and space. Yet, as we have seen, the autobiography culminates with *La Cérémonie* as final 'adieux', and this final text has as its focus not the self but the other. Inevitably, the author cannot defy mortality, and her legacy to Sylvie Le Bon, which puts in the latter's hands the decision whether to publish material posthumously, also calls into question the extent of the power which can be exerted 'beyond the grave'.

Death as experience which is both individual and personal, and universal, matches Beauvoir's project. Clark points out that Foucault had recognized the power of death, seeing it as 'the setting wherein the dull monotony of life is transcended to take on a true individuality [...]. This apparent contradiction, between death as a final closure and a new unfolding [...]'.[8] Beauvoir breaks a taboo by writing in detail about the subject of death and degeneration, and Clark's observations about the role of death in modern society strike parallels with her autothanatographical project, as he observes that, '[...] individuals in modern societies must shape their own identities and systems of meaning within a private sphere of social relations. In this context death presents particular problems, threatening alienation and existential isolation'.[9] If we take into consideration Beauvoir's understanding of the writing project and her own subjectivity, this helps to clarify her position. The analysis of a self-in-the-world and a self-to-death brings her explorations in philosophy and her autobiographical project together. Her focus on 'universal' questions seems to have further reinforced her portrayal as 'public persona' perhaps more than as autobiographer who raises key questions about death and ageing and who highlights the problematic representation of the woman intellectual.

Writing about death and writing against death become a means through which to control it. In the process, Beauvoir confronts ethical questions of existence such as that of the individual's responsibility to society. Yet, as this study has aimed to demonstrate, the moments when Beauvoir writes as 'on' or 'nous' tend to signal the death of the woman autobiographer: 'Le "je" dont je me sers est très souvent en vérité un "nous" ou un "on", qui fait allusion à l'ensemble

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[8] *The Sociology of Death: Theory, Culture, Practice* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 3.
[9] Ibid., p. 4.

de mon siècle plutôt qu'à moi-même'.[10] Such comments do, nonetheless, need to be considered in the light of the author's keen awareness of the pitfalls associated with the autobiographical enterprise, and with respect to particular attempts on her part to communicate both universal and particular experiences in a bid to present a 'universel singularisé'.[11]

On the whole, death as shaping principle of the autothanatographies has been shown to inhibit the presentation of the embodied female writer; the presentation of an increasingly intellectualized and philosophized life and self tends to dominate. In fact, the autobiographical project could be viewed as an extension of the philosophical questions raised in *Le Deuxième sexe* and *La Vieillesse*, which almost serve as its bookends. Whether this 'universalizing' of self within philosophical parameters and through 'public intertexts' has preserved Beauvoir's autobiographical *œuvre* within the canon is debatable. Indeed, this study has highlighted the difficulties in bridging the two spheres of the 'universal' (ungendered) and the particular, in which the 'universal' position is in fact not ungendered but often a masculine one.

The emphasis here, then, has been on the important role of the public sphere for Beauvoir as autobiographer. It is for this reason that the often overlapping genres of letters, diaries and fiction as private or concealed expressions of self have not been considered in detail, as they occlude the specific question of how the self is presented in the public sphere. Likewise, the relationship between writing and the death-drive has been analysed primarily in philosophical rather than psychoanalytical terms. My aim has been to move towards a theory of writing as death-drive, specifically as a metaphysical exploration of self and existence within a framework of embodied experiences in the world and in dialogue with others. This has taken into consideration

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[10] 'Mon expérience d'écrivain', in *Les Écrits de Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. by Claude Francis and Fernande Gontier (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), pp. 439-57 (p. 450).

[11] Ibid., p. 451. Beauvoir also states, for example: '[...] j'ai l'intention de porter le témoignage sur mon époque et sur d'autres gens qui ont vécu avec moi des événements que j'ai vécus. D'autre part ce "je", lorsque je le prononce, c'est aussi le "je" d'une femme' (p. 450).

the limiting factor of publicity and success for the writer and the need to maintain a private space for the self in the writing project. Examination of the powerful influence of death on writing, starting from the basic premise that the death drive is located in existential angst, and surfaces as a 'negativity' or a disordering principle in the text, has been shown to have served as counterpoint to the existentialist project of transcendence.

Rereading existentialism as philosophy in the autobiographies has offered a means to expose its limitations and contradictions, and raises questions about the relationship between gender and existentialism for autobiography studies. This is underlined most strongly in Beauvoir's case in the absence of a place for the woman writer as *embodied* self to occupy the *pour-soi* position. Furthermore, the supremacy of the intellect over the self as *mortal* highlights a further blindspot for the positioning of the situated self. In this regard, Clark's observations below reinforce the important role which death plays in our understanding of selfhood:

> It [death] gives expression to the relationship between the individual and society and to public, private and gendered experiences. Supremely, it presents us with an irreducible facticity: that human bodies are finite. That just as they are born, so too they must die.[12]

Auto*thanato*graphy confronts the question of embodiment which is so often 'rationalized' by existentialist readings of the self. Indeed, throughout Beauvoir's œuvre, the self as 'intellect' tends to be portrayed as immune to degeneration, in contrast with representations of madness and degeneration in (predominantly) female 'others' in the texts. This study has highlighted the problems of negotiating existentialism from a gendered point of view through a framework that necessitates a rethinking of the notions of freedom and choice, in particular the ambiguity of 'freedom' for the well-known figure and her public image.[13]

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[12] *The Sociology of Death: Theory, Culture, Practice*, op. cit., p. 3.

[13] Philosophers analysing Beauvoir's œuvre have been broadening the scope of the analysis. Lundgren-Gothlin, as noted earlier, has re-evaluated Beauvoir's philosophy in detail in the context of a phenomenological tradition. See 'Lire Simone de Beauvoir à la lumière de Heidegger', *Les Temps modernes*, 619 (2002), 53-77.

It remains to be seen whether, beyond the sphere of this study, autothanatography has wider applications in articulating, for example, the particular preoccupations of women autobiographers like Beauvoir, who are situated both within the canon and at its margins. We might ask whether in more general terms it provides the space in which women writers could be read as voicing themselves against death and annihilation, and where they are given a space to articulate themselves as embodied subjects beyond the mythologized images of idolized Other in *death*, or death-dealing Medusa. Fellow French women writers such as Chantal Chawaf, Hélène Cixous, Linda Lê, Marguerite Duras and Nathalie Sarraute could offer further avenues of exploration given their depictions of absence, silence and death within the context of women's subjectivity and narrative voice.[14] Indeed, if we share Margaret Atwood's viewpoint, it is death that drives all writing: '[…] the hypothesis is that not just some, but *all* writing of the narrative kind, and perhaps all writing, is motivated, deep down, by a fear of and a fascination with mortality – by a desire to make the risky trip to the Underworld, and to bring something or someone back from the dead'.[15]

Reading from the thanatographical perspective, in my view, offers a site for the relationship between the writing drive, gender, self and other to be explored. With *Le Deuxième sexe* in mind, Beauvoir can be celebrated as an autobiographer who questions the key issues of existence which have often been evaded in the binary framework which separates mind from body. Furthermore, she articulates the difficulty for women to be read as both intellectual *and* embodied. In this respect, reading the death-drive as creative potential for women writers, rather than as locus of women's erasure in death, offers an alternative to the pessimistic statement made in *Le Deuxième sexe* more than fifty years ago: 'Ce qui est certain, c'est que jusqu'ici les possibilités de la femme ont été *étouffées* et *perdues* pour l'humanité et qu'il est grand temps dans son intérêt et dans celui de tous qu'on lui laisse enfin courir toutes ses chances' (*DS*, II, p. 641) (my emphasis).

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[14] Full references are provided in the bibliography. See also Marson's study, *Le temps de l'autobiographie: Violette Leduc, ou, La mort avant la lettre* (Saint-Denis: Presses universitaires de Vincennes, 1998).
[15] *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), p. 156.

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Index